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The Computer Paper

December 2007

Volume 20 Number 12

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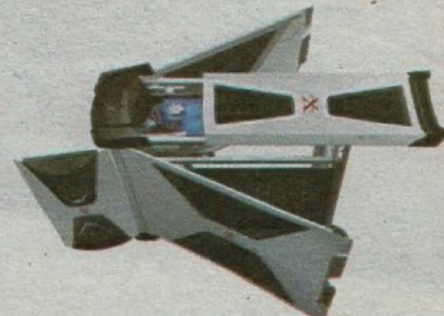


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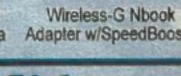
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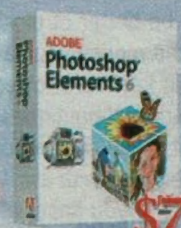
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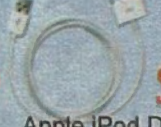
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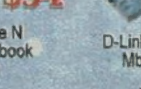
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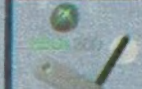
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'Tis the season...



It's that time of year again. The time when, leading up to the holidays, you're already getting tired of the non stop barrage of carols, themed pop songs and holiday medleys, when everyone seems to forget just how exactly to drive in the snow, when your wallet is empty, your credit card maxed and your stress level through the roof. When all is said and done though, it all somehow seems worth it for a few days of family togetherness and fun.

In keeping with tradition, this is the Gift Guide issue of HUB: The Computer Paper. The idea is to highlight some of the more interesting tech toys, productivity boosters, cool, interesting and innovative gifts, all available in Canada.

As we are HUB: The Computer Paper, pay special attention to our Boutique PC buyer's guide. Here, Editor-at-Large David Tanaka runs through the basics of picking out the perfect PC.

Boutique PC, you may be saying, what the heck is that?

Boutique PC is a nicer and more accurate way of referring to what we have traditionally called the "beige-" or "white-boxes;" customized PCs, available from the hundreds or thousands of smaller PC retailers in towns, cities and even villages all across Canada. In much the same way you go to a flower boutique to pick out the perfect bouquet or a jewelry boutique to customize the perfect sparkly trinket for someone you love, a boutique PC is built from the ground up for you or, in the holiday spirit of " 'tis better to give than to receive," the person you're shopping for. It uses the components you want, is scaled to meet your budget and needs. It is a balance of price and performance. You can sometimes even pick out the operating system you want to use; try doing that at a big box retailer. In short, a boutique PC shop is not bound by the same economies of scale that dictate what products are stocked on the shelves at a big box store. The dedicated owner operators are knowledgeable in the products they sell. They do the research and can help you assemble the perfect PC for you at a price you can afford.

Boutique PC shops (what we have previously referred to as "mom and pop computer shops") can take the time to walk you through your buying decision. When shopping for the perfect PC for you, the first question the boutique PC shop will probably ask is "what do you want to do with it?" It's the age old question that helps you scale a PC to your needs, to balance price and performance and to future-proof yourself... as much as is possible with a field that sees as many changes as quickly as tech does.

A high end rig with 4GB of RAM, a 512MB video card with dual-DVI outs and a four core processor overclocked and running so hot it needs an industrial fan to keep from frying under the weight of its own performance is all well and good if you're training to be a pro cyber athlete. If you're just looking to send some emails, watch a few videos, surf the web and use office productivity tools though, it's overkill in the extreme. You'd be better off picking up a reasonably spec'd beige box-I mean Boutique PC-and spending the money you save on a big, wide screen LCD monitor to reduce eyestrain, a more comfortable keyboard to reduce fatigue and an ergonomic mouse to serve the same purpose. Your local boutique PC shop can help you in making that decision. In fact, they've probably got a few suggestions of their own on things to consider and should already have hands-on experience with most of the products they sell. Add to that the fact that, if something goes wrong you know who you need to go talk to and the value proposition gets that much stronger.

As with everything, there are some bad apples out there; stores that cut corners, that under-configure machines, that swap out components you've paid for with cheaper ones or that use pirated software in an attempt to skirt the system and make a little extra money. They are the exception to the rule, however, and if you encounter one, you are encouraged to alert the proper authorities and spread the word. The beauty is though, even if you do encounter one of these bad apples, you are the customer and can easily take your business elsewhere. This has the dual benefit of elevating shops that offer good value and excellent service to the top of the heap and making it harder for the nefarious shop owners to keep at it.

Wishing you and yours and all the joy of the holidays with none of the rigmarole... though that probably can't be avoided.

Enjoy the issue,
Andrew Moore-Crispin

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A PC for the holidays

A boutique PC buyer's guide



Logitech diNovo Edge



Is there a PC or two on your buy list? Stroll down to your neighbourhood PC boutique and you'll find enough variations on the PC to find just the right balance of what you crave and what you can afford. One of the benefits of shopping at a retail specialist is that if you are knowledgeable, you can go in with a list of components you must have, and the shop will build your system to spec. If price is a major concern, you'll find a benefit too, because most stores will list models that step up in regular price intervals – \$100 increments, for example, or sometimes even less. If the \$600 model is just a bit too rich for you, maybe the one at \$499 will do.

These relatively small pricing differences mean you have to read the fine print, and even then, you may not be able to weigh what you are getting for that extra \$80, or what you are not getting by saving \$80 on a system.

You'll sometimes find broader categories with bigger price jumps between them, and this is a good place to start our guide since the differences are more obvious. A common product break is the basic, budget or value system, the mainstream system and the specialist system, which could be one for gamers, for home theatre enthusiasts, or an industrial-strength workstation.

A \$200 PC

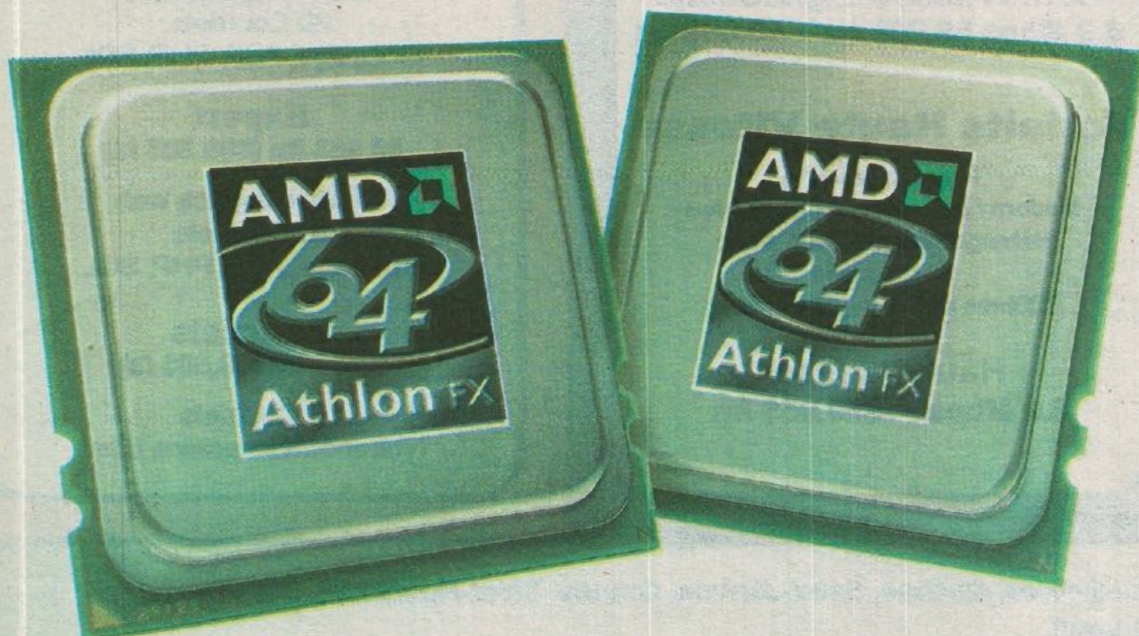
The value system will be under \$500, sometimes as little as \$200. A typical \$200 system will use a single core processor (AMD Sempron or Intel Celeron) have 512MB of memory, graphics processor embedded on the motherboard rather than as a separate graphics card, and graphics memory shared with system memory, embedded audio, on-board LAN, an 80GB hard drive and a DVD burner. You might get a no-name keyboard, mouse and speakers as part of the package, but a monitor, the operating system and any other software will be extra. In other words, you'll have to spend at least another \$100 on Windows Vista and \$200 on a monitor to turn that bucket of components into a usable computer. And while you're at it you'll want to spend perhaps \$100 more to bump the RAM

up to 2GB. Running Vista in 512MB might be a reality, but not a practical one.

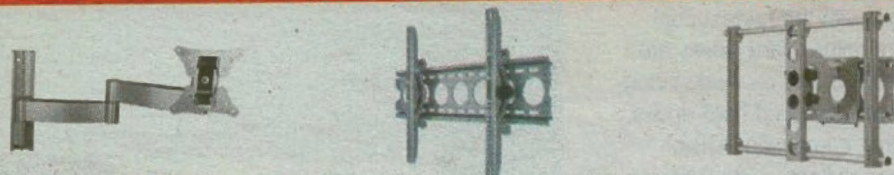
Suddenly the \$200 value PC is pulling \$600 out of your wallet, but that's assuming you are starting from scratch. It may be the case that you are replacing an older system, so you already have a monitor that is still working well, plus you can re-register the OS on the new system if you scrap the old one. In short, if you are replacement shopping, you might find a bargain in the \$200-\$300 range, but not if you need a complete, turnkey system.

Solid in the middle

For one of those – computer, monitor, operating system, you won't find much under \$600. But in the \$600-\$800 price bracket the product becomes much more interesting. Instead of a single core Celeron or Sempron, you'll be presented with an entry or mid-level dual core Intel CoreDuo or AMD Athlon64x2 processor, 1GB of RAM, bigger hard drive and a decent flat panel monitor. Chances are there'll be a multi-slot card reader on the system, for memory cards from digital cameras or camcorders. You might still have to settle for the graphics processor and sound card being embedded on the motherboard, although systems with separate graphics cards start showing up in this price band, and the audio may support 5.1 or 6.1 surround sound. You will also start to see SATA hard drives and optical drives being advertised. Serial ATA is the controller architecture that is set to replace parallel ATA. There are presently two active and one pending SATA specifications. SATA 1 offers a bandwidth of approximately 1.5 gigabits/sec or 150MB per second, which is marginally faster than PATA/133. SATA 2 (SATA 3.0 Gbits/sec) doubles the bandwidth to approximately 300MB per second while a pending spec.



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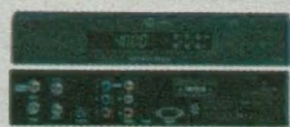


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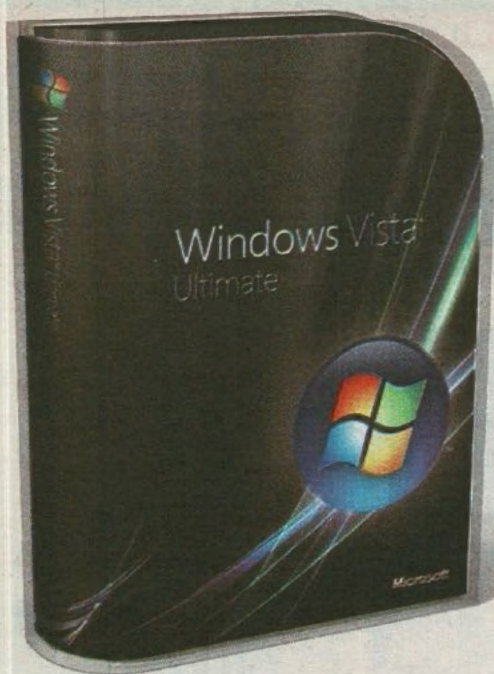
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XtremePC



As you approach and cross over the \$1,000 mark, you start getting into seriously fast and often targeted systems. Here you'll find systems with the fastest dual core processors or quad-core chips. Hard drives are bigger, 320GB or perhaps 500GB and on workstation-class systems you may find two mirrored hard drives. You'll start finding systems that come with 2GB of RAM, and you'll also find more systems with separate graphics cards. Systems targeted to extreme gamers will be dual graphics card set ups, either nVidia SLI or ATI CrossFire variations. These offer tremendous 3D rendering performance, which is needed with some of the more advanced PC games, but also help in 3D modelling applications too.

The extras that come with the system will also be recognized brand names – Logitech for keyboards, mice and speakers, or Altec Lansing for speakers, for example. You may also encounter specialized ports like Firewire (for camcorders) or HDMI (high definition video) depending on who the target buyer is for a particular configuration.

Beware price creep

Suppose you've found your perfect \$700 PC, except for That "except for" could be about any number of components: maybe you want a processor that's a tick faster, or a bigger hard drive, or – well, the list could go on and on. Continue in this fashion and your \$700 computer has suddenly turned into a \$1,000 computer. But your retailer sells a different model for \$1,000, so the question is whether the pre-configured \$1,000 computer is a better value than the \$700 one to which you've added \$300 worth of goodies. Often it is, but there is no clear-cut answer to this, so you need to do further homework.

By David Tanaka

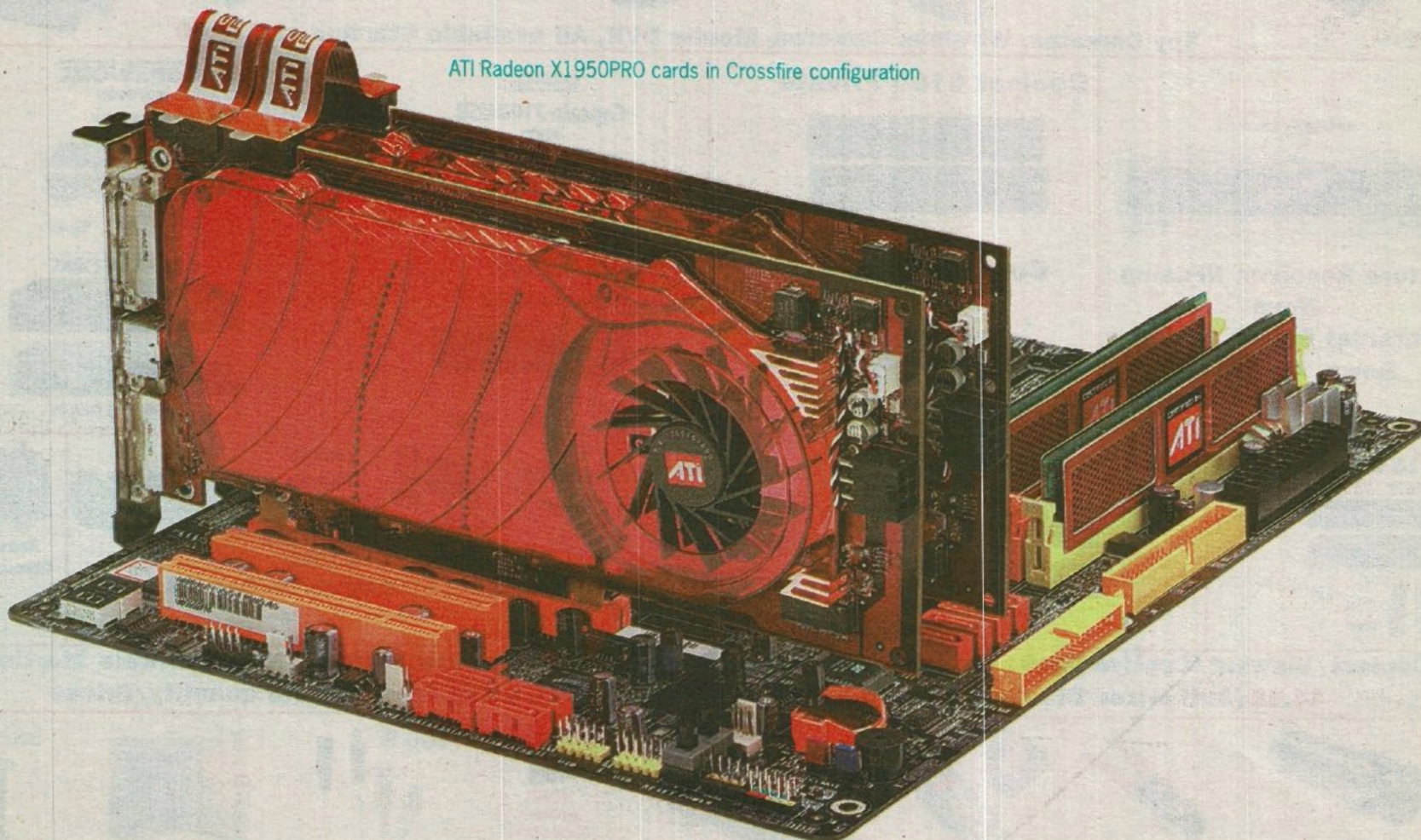
SATA 6.0 Gbits/sec doubles that again. Even SATA 2 far exceeds the demands of today's fastest hard drives, so you won't likely notice any performance jump with SATA and today's drive technology. But SATA is by no means a hollow feature – there are other benefits, not the least of which is simplified and improved cabling.

Such a system is versatile and will easily serve the needs of a typical single user or family. The most useful extra, especially if you run Windows Vista is to bring the RAM up to 2GB but other than that, the system is ready to rock and roll. Just add your favourite software.

The notebook connection

A few years ago the sub-\$1,000 notebook was a pipe dream, but today you'll find notebooks even kissing the \$600 price point – and not el-strippos. A notebook you buy for a given price will be less featured than a desktop machine for the same price. However, hard drive capacity and processor speed has reached a level where the enough-is-enough factor plays a bigger role. In the \$600-\$800 price band, you can find notebooks that have pretty impressive specs: dual core processor, large hard drive, 15-inch screen, 1GB of RAM, built in card readers. Built-in Wi-Fi – plus the advantage of portability. You'll get higher performance from a desktop computer in the same price range (bigger monitor, faster hard drive and processor), but will that really matter to your everyday computing? You're really the only person that can answer that question.

ATI Radeon X1950PRO cards in Crossfire configuration



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† Modem must be returned at the end of the service.

Seven under \$50

Gadgets, games, gifts and gear for under \$50

Jabra BT620



After living large this fall – blowing cash on school or work supplies, shopping sprees for new clothes or paying through the nose for good NHL seats – you might find yourself a little tight for cash going into the holiday season.

The good news, however, is you can still get your tech fix thanks to dirt-cheap products that deliver the goods. In other words, you no longer need to break the bank to walk away with some cool technology. Don't believe us? The following are a few notable examples of some great gadgets and games that don't break the \$50 mark.

Rock or talk

BT620

Jabra \$36.99

www.jabra.com

Keep your mobile phone tucked away in your jeans, backpack or purse, and enjoy your favourite music wirelessly with the Jabra BT620s, a wireless pair

of behind-the-neck stereo Bluetooth headphones. When a call comes in you want to take, press a small button and the music will pause as you take the call (a small microphone is built into the right earphone). The Jabra BT620s offer up to 16 hours of talk time or up to 14 hours of wireless music streaming.

This stone doesn't skip

Zen Stone

Creative \$47.99

www.creative.com

Carry more than 250 songs in your pocket with the aptly named Creative Zen Stone, a smooth rock-shaped MP3 player with crystal-clear audio quality. Connect this device to your PC via a USB cord (included), drag and drop your favourite MP3s or WMAs (Windows Media Audio), unplug and go. The bundled earbuds are also surprisingly good. While it doesn't have a built-in clamp to

Zen Stone



secure it to clothing and while it's missing an LCD screen, it's a great deal that sounds likewise.

Heed the "Call"

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

PC version Activision \$49.99

www.activision.com

ESRB: Mature

Activision's "Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare" (\$49.99 for PC version; BestBuy.ca) is an incredibly intense present-day military shooter that drops players in hot spots around the globe as both a U.S. Marine and British S.A.S. soldier. To take on the rogue enemy group that's threatening the world, gamers have access to more than 70 authentic weapons as well as accessories such as night-vision goggles. Most of the high-definition action takes place on foot, but gamers can also ride in helicopters and other vehicles. Multiple online modes also keep the war

alive in cyberspace. Take heed to the "Mature" rating.

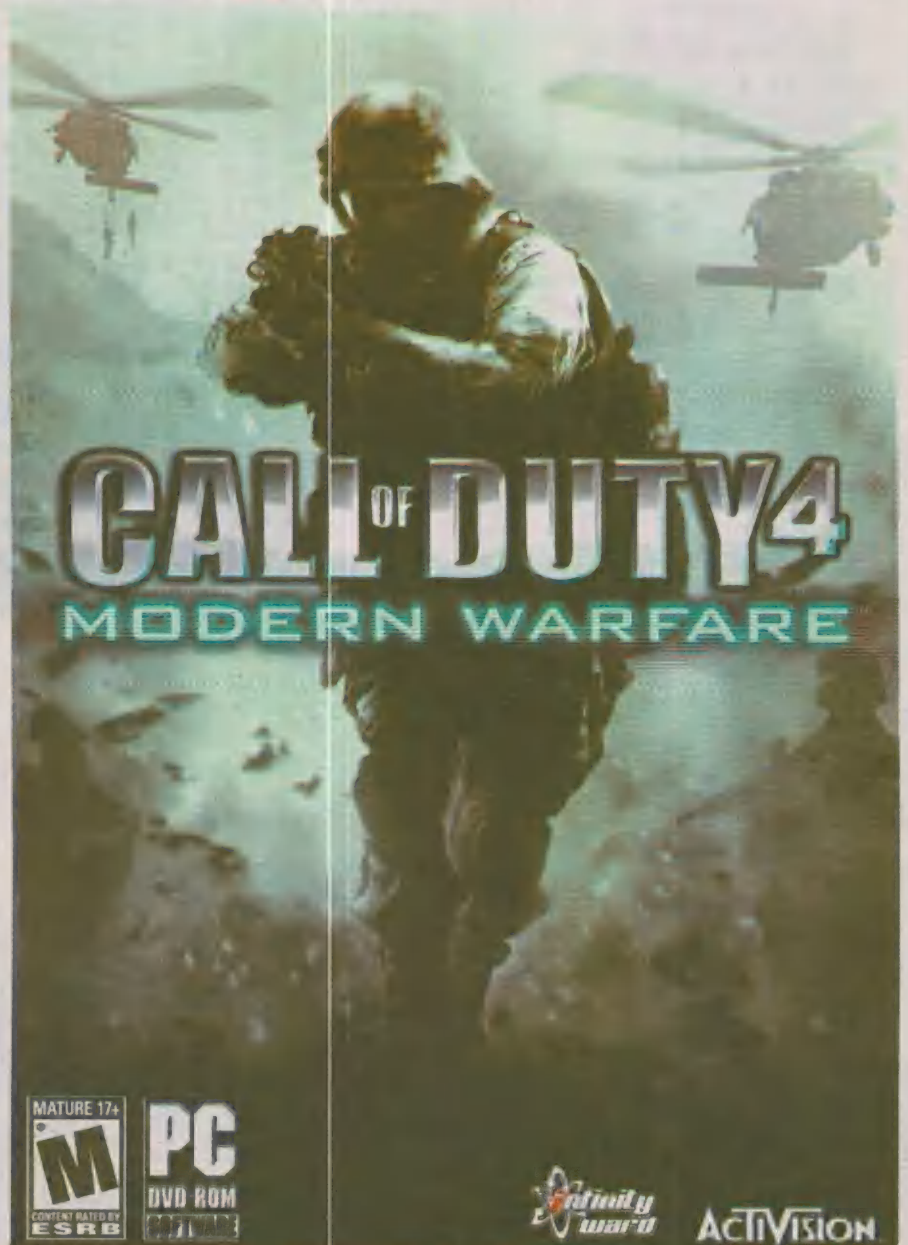
Wireless widget

Wireless G Router WRT54G

Linksys \$49.99

www.linksys.com

If you're still plugging your laptop into a router to access the Internet, it's time to un-tether yourself from the wall and kick back anywhere in the home, porch or back patio. The Linksys Wireless G Router gives your laptop wireless speeds up to 54 Megabits per second (802.11g technology) so you can log on anywhere within about a 35 metre radius to download tunes, chat via webcam or play online games. While not the latest Wi-Fi speeds – that would be up to 300 Mbps with "802.11n," not yet being widely used – this Linksys model is a reliable and affordable wireless wonder.



MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

PC
DVD ROM
GAME

Infinity
war

ACTIVISION

Linksys Wireless G Router WRT54G



The hell you will

Hellgate London
Namco / EA \$49.99
www.hellgatelondon.com
ESRB: Mature

From the savvy team that created the mega-popular Diablo franchise comes this four-years-in-the-making thriller. Played from an immersive first-person perspective, Namco/EA's "Hellgate: London" (\$49.99; FutureShop.ca) is an action-heavy role-playing game that challenges players to save Britain's capital city from demonic attacks in the year 2038. In this post-apocalyptic shooter you play as one of three distinct character factions, each with their own strengths and weaknesses, all levels are dynamically generated so no two environments play out the exact same way twice. Online modes also add to the "Mature"-rated fun.

By Marc Saltzman

Show those pearly whites

LifeCam VX-3000
Microsoft \$49.99
www.microsoft.com/hardware

Text messaging with just, er, text, is so 20th century. Instead bring your online conversations to life with video and audio – which also means you can tell your long distance phone provider where to go. The Microsoft LifeCam VX-3000 offers superior video quality (640 x 480 pixels, at 30 frames per second) and high-definition still photos (1280 x 960 pixels), along with other handy features such as a built-in microphone, one-touch "Call" button and automatic face-tracking software. If you're faking a sick call into work, however, just be aware you might have to dress the part, too.

Memory in a flash

4GB JetFlash V10 USB Flash Drive
Transcend \$48.99
www.transcend.com

The Transcend 4GB JetFlash V10 USB Flash Drive can do a lot more than just store 1,000 songs, thousands of photos and documents or six two-hour feature films using video compression codecs. With built-in security software you can choose to encrypt your important files just in case it falls into the wrong hands if lost. Called "Secret-Zip," you can assign a password to access your files, or take advantage of the auto website sign-in so you don't have to manually type in a password when accessing your favourite sites in cyberspace.



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Beyond the flat bed scanner

Specialized devices for specialized jobs

Scanners have become such a common part of the technology landscape that they hardly get noticed – even your basic \$200 multifunction has a decent flatbed scanner onboard. There are, however, a smaller variety of scanning devices dedicated to a narrow range of tasks. If your need is specific, one of these specialists might just be what you've been looking for.

Pricing is based on a direct order from the manufacturer. Note that prices differ widely online and at retail.

CardScan Executive

CardScan US\$249.99
www.cardscan.com

The name describes the function, the product and company. CardScan has been around for nearly a decade and a half, dedicated to the single task of moving those stacks of business cards we all seem to accumulate into digital form. CardScan offers a number of different products, many aimed at large sales forces and corporate environments, but a couple fit into individual user's lifestyles. We looked at the CardScan Executive (\$299.99 online) which pairs contact management software with a colour business card scanner. The scanner is quick – the company claims under four seconds for a colour business card.

The software intelligently parses the card information into the correct contact fields. You can add contacts from other sources – email and websites for example to the contacts database. The software will also find and cull duplicate cards. Once you've built your contacts database, you can search and sort on a variety of fields, as you would expect. You can also print labels or do a MapQuest search on an address.

The CardScan contact database will synchronize with most common contact managers such as Act! or Goldmine, and Outlook address books, and Palm and Mobile Windows devices. It will sync with BlackBerry devices, but that requires a \$35 utility called the CardScan Connector for BlackBerry. If you are a Mac user, you're out of luck

as the CardScan Executive works with Windows only. For \$100 less you can get the CardScan Personal, which uses a monochrome business card scanner.

DocuPen RC-800

Planon US\$349
www.planon.com

The DocuPen RC-800 looks like an oversize pen but it's nicely proportioned and in that sculpted shape is a full-page scanner, plus 8MB onboard memory to hold about 100 scanned pages, plus a microSD memory card slot for more storage, plus a rechargeable Lithium Ion battery. That's right, the scanner is totally self-contained.

The pen shape has a flat bottom, which is where the scanner assembly comes in contact with the page to be scanned. Tiny rollers help keep the scanner moving in a straight path across the page during the scan, and Planon says you can complete a scan eight-inches wide by up to 36 inches long.

Two buttons on the unit allow you to select the colour mode (black and white, 12-bit colour or 24-bit colour) and scanner resolution (100/200 or 200/400). LED backlit icons indicate the modes, plus there are warning symbols for too fast a scanning speed, memory capacity and battery charge level.

The unit comes with scanner drivers for Windows and Mac along with with PaperPort SE document management software for Windows only. It also has a USB 2.0 port, which is used to connect the scanner to the computer to download the scans and also to recharge the battery.

The DocuPen RC-800 has a suggested price of \$299. A Pro model is also available that includes optical character recognition software.

IrisPen Executive 6

Iris US\$199
www.irislink.com

Iris was formed a couple of decades ago and developed one of the first PC-

CardScan Executive



based optical character recognition systems. It later gained a reputation for its ReadIris OCR software, now in version 11 for both Windows and Mac. The company also makes a pen scanner called the IrisPen 6.

The pen scanner is shaped like a broad-tipped highlighter marker, and you use it in much the same way. As you move the tip across a line of text (or numbers), you are actually scanning it and converting it to alphanumeric characters using optical character recognition. The IrisPen directly transfers the OCR'd characters to a computer application such as a word processor or spreadsheet via USB and also draws power from the port.

IrisPen 6 comes in three versions: Express (approx. \$130) is the basic model; Translator (approx. \$150) includes a module that translates language pairs (for example English to and from French, German, Portuguese, Spanish or Russian); and Executive (approx. \$200) includes modules to scan bar codes and hand printing.

Iris also makes a line of business card scanners called IrisCard 4. These are sold in a variety of configurations (e.g., ReadIris Mini 4, selling for \$129 is the basic greyscale model, while ReadIris Pro, selling for \$199, is a single user product that includes a colour scanner). ReadIris card scanners work with both Windows and Mac.

QuickLink Pen Elite

WizCom US\$169.95 www.wizcomtech.com

The first pen scanner we encountered was from WizComm Technologies Ltd.. That early product has evolved into the QuickLink Pen Elite. WizCom targets a broad range of users for the QuickLink-Pen Elite – from students to office workers and professionals like doctors.

Like the IrisPen previously discussed, you use the QuickLink Pen much like you would use a text highlighter. As you run the tip across the characters, a scanning head digitizes the information. The unit is powered by two AAA cells and has onboard memory so you can store the equivalent 1,000 pages of text in the unit. You can then beam the information to a Palm or Windows Mobile device or smartphone via an infrared connection or download it to a computer using a USB connection.

The Elite has a couple of unusual features. There is a text to speech function that allows you to hear the scanned text (it has a built-in speaker as well as a headphone jack). It also has a built-in dictionary so you can look up the definition of any word you've scanned. Like the IrisPen, the WizCom unit supports direct to PC scanning via USB. The QuickLink-Pen Elite is not compatible with Mac.

By David Tanaka

DocuPen RC-800



Cisco Training

WinNET Produced 186 CCIEs



Tejas Suthar
CCIE # 8423, Telus



Ravi Chandran
CCIE # 8671, Telus



Kamran Adil
CCIE # 10373, Bell Nexxia



Terence Summerville
CCIE # 8927, Infostream



Virgilio Santos
CCIE # 9454, Bell Canada



Santosh Koshi
CCIE # 12028, BT



Darryl Coelho
CCIE # 11992, Bell Canada



S. Kanagasundarajah
CCIE # 12417



Nigel Maharaj
CCIE # 9916, IBM Global Service



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Raj Thava
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Giuseppe Giorgio
CCIE # 10422, Next Innovation



Hankeeran Somasundaram
CCIE # 11904, Stargate



Kaushik Narayanan
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Edward Rajca
CCIE # 11112



Garry Low
CCIE # 11433



Syed Mukhtar
CCIE # 11513



Ganesh Shanmugalingam
CCIE # 10662, AT & T



Ahmed Khan
CCIE # 11146



Nadeem Akbar
CCIE # 11610



Fauzan Siddiqui
CCIE # 11653



Amir Syed
CCIE # 12249



Sunil Soporle
CCIE # 11942



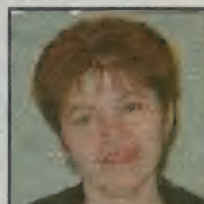
Andre Julien
CCIE # 12142, Telus



Sarwar Jamal
CCIE # 11562, Bell Canada



Zar Staroselski
CCIE # 11575, Telus



Snezhly Neshkova
CCIE # 11931, Cisco



Vimal Nanthacumar
CCIE # 12029, Telus



Muhammad Shakil
CCIE # 12143



Craig Henriques
CCIE # 11180, Network Builder



John Lilek
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Imran Tauqir
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Abu Uddin
CCIE # 12158, Outsource IT



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Mahtab Alam
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SOHOGGFHOW

Small or home office gift guide for home office workers

In the small office, space is always at a premium. That special someone who toils away day in, day out from a cramped home office deserves some of the latest gear to help maximize the available space, maximize their productivity to in turn, maximize the free time they get to enjoy.

One printer to rule them all-in-one MFC-885CW

Brother \$319.99 www.brother.ca

It's an obvious choice for the SOHO aficionado in your life; an all-in-one document processing and communication centre that's no bigger than a typical stand-alone printer. For making the occasional photocopy, for printing documents, for easily integrating with your wired or wireless network, for scanning documents to your desktop over said network, the MFC-885CW deserves a look. For including a 5.8Ghz cordless phone instead of the corded varieties that are the norm in this category and including a fully featured phone and fax messaging centre, it deserves a spot on any organized (or desperately trying to be so) small or home office worker's desk.

On the front of the unit sits an array of media card slots that will accept common camera storage media like SD, xD, CompactFlash and others, available to any computer on the network. This top of the line model

also includes a category first 4.2-inch wide screen LCD that is useful for on-screen photo previewing and before and after edit viewing and previewing of faxes to save needless printing of junk. The printer connects to your wireless 802.11b/g network after a fairly simple set-up process. This true "multi-function centre" comes with one 5.8Ghz telephone handset included and acts as a base station for up to three additional handsets, purchased separately.

The invisible gift TL-WR542G

TP-Link \$44.99 www.tplink.com

If your SOHO recipient is tripping over wires on the morning commute from bedroom to office, perhaps it's time they went wireless. A wireless router is a nice gift but go the extra step and consider setting the network up for them if yours is a technophobic telecommuter. Come summer time, it can mean the difference between sitting on the back porch patiently waiting for an email to chime in and madly bashing the send/receive button so they can get the message and get the hell out of the office on a Friday afternoon.

TP-Link makes solid and well priced routers well suited to the SOHO with greater range when transmitting in 802.11b/g. Set-up is a breeze and there are plenty of options to tinker with, including scheduling, MAC

address blocking / allowing, port triggering and remote management via the web. It's also firmware upgradeable, if you're looking to dig deeper and do more.

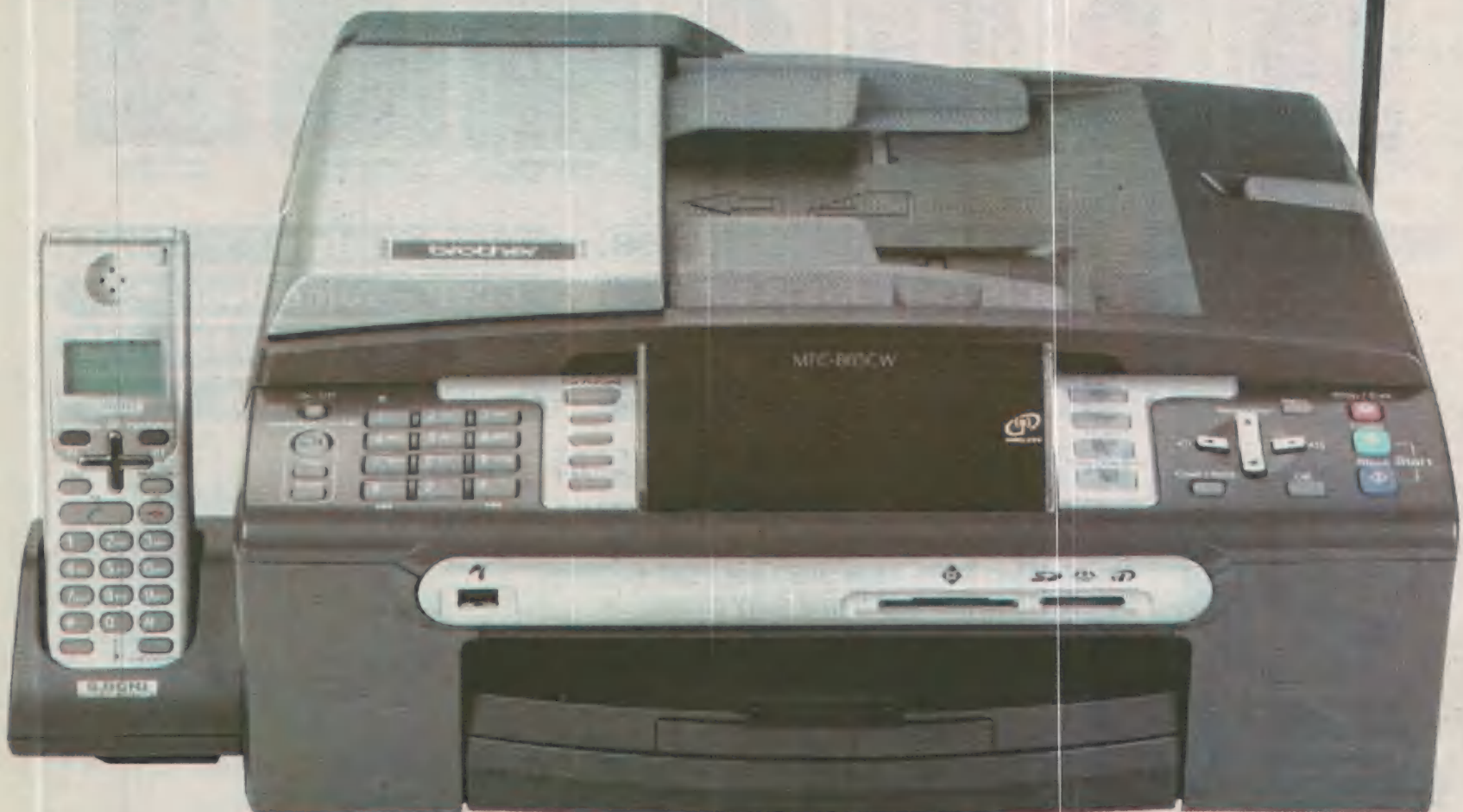
Wireless...with a couple less wires TD-W8920G

TP-Link \$75.99 www.tplink.com

Going wireless can seem to be impossible. To get your wireless router up and running, it'll need a power supply (with, naturally, a wire) and your cable or DSL modem (with power supply and connection to either a coaxial cable port or to a phone line) and you'll need to join the two up with an Ethernet cable. TP-Link may have another worthwhile solution to consider, provided you're not using cable. The TD-W8920G is a wireless and / or wired router and also an ADSL modem. In other words, your SOHOer will be able to tell his or her DSL service provider to take the \$5 modem rental off their bill every month.

Rather than opting for a wireless package from your DSL ISP where they'd integrate a very similar solution and charge a monthly surcharge for the privilege, with a little configuration elbow grease, you can do it yourself.

Brother MFC-885CW



Palm Treo 750



Office in your pocket

Treo 750

Palm, \$249.99 with a 3-year service plan
www.rogers.com / www.palm.com

Give your home office worker the opportunity to get out of the office; a smartphone like Palm's recently released Treo 750 may fit the bill. With it, your diligent SOHOer has easily configurable access to his or her main email account, can store and edit documents, spreadsheets and presentations, get high speed data access to the net for making sure the Facebook community is always aware of his or her mood at any given moment... along with more useful functions like online mapping (Google Maps for smartphones works and is a downloadable app), quick research on the go, access to online news, stocks, weather and the like.

The Treo 750 runs Windows Mobile and so there's a wealth of add-on applications to make for a fully customized smartphone device; everything from calorie counters to stock tickers, shopping list organizers to any one of thousands of games.

Taking the wide view

VX1945wm

Viewsonic \$289.99 www.viewsonic.com

A wide screen LCD monitor is perhaps not the sort of investment your SOHOer would make for him or herself. However, increased screen real

estate, reduced eyestrain (especially relative to old school CRT monitors) and higher resolution can make for a real productivity boost. Isn't that the perfect gift? Just think how much more productive your SOHO worker will feel when he or she can open a document in one half of the screen and bash out an email response to the document, addressing its key points, on the other half. Or open financial management software in one half and file a tax return in the other. Or play Solitaire on one half while watching TV on the other. Or, in the case of the true at home multi-tasker, keep an eye on a video baby monitor on one half while balancing the year end sales figures on the other.

Look for a monitor that offers at least a 1,440 x 900 native resolution and dig in to the PC's display properties to make sure any LCD-specific enhancements are turned on ("sub-pixel font smoothing," "ClearType etc.), especially if your SOHOer is making the jump from CRT.

The Viewsonic 19" VX1945wm pictured adds a little something extra in the form of a piano black finish and an iPod dock so your SOHO worker can listen to their favourite songs through the tiny 2x2-watt speakers and 3-watt subwoofer and charge their iPod at the same time. It's also got an 8-in-1 card reader mounted on the right side of the base. It's a 700:1 contrast, 5ms response, 160 degree horizontal and vertical viewable, 300 cd/m2, anti-glare screen and they're sure to thank you for it.

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Viewsonic VX1945wm



Available in red, grey-blue and dark blue, the Joakim features a gliding seat that gently slides out when you recline and plenty of potential for adjustment to get just the right feel for your SOHO worker. They'll probably still be thanking you ten years later when the warranty on this solidly built chair finally runs out. Some assembly required; it is Ikea, after all.

ML-1630

Samsung S249 www.samsung.ca

It's not often that the words "mono-chrome laser printer" and "sleek, sexy and stylish" can be used together in the same sentence.

Samsung's ML-1630 is a melding of form and function; it's perfectly suited to the worker whose home office resembles something out of an Ikea catalogue photo shoot where every minimalist thing has its place in the grand scheme in the never ending quest for work / home balance.

At two thirds the size of competitors in the category, the ML-1630 does away with buttons, offering instead soft-touch sensors that come to life under the shiny facade. A unique semi-automatic docking paper cassette even makes loading paper kinda sexy. Under the hood, it's all pretty standard stuff and well suited to the generally lower demands of an individual or small team SOHO; 17 pages per minute in letter, 5,000 page per month duty cycle, 2,000 page standard page yield from toner cartridge, 1,200 x 1,600 dpi printing, multiple compatible page media and USB 2.0 interface. However, for the individual SOHO worker looking to create an attractive and functional work space, it's worth its weight in uber shiny piano black plastic.

By Andrew Moore-Crispin

Sit on it

Joakim Swivel Chair

Ikea \$299.99 www.ikea.ca/en

Sure, you could pony up \$800 or more for the Humanscale Liberty, successor to the iconic Aeron mesh office chair from Herman Miller. And sure, your SOHO recipient would likely be overjoyed as their whole body reaped the benefits of proper posture and true office comfort lent by a fully ergonomic and beautifully engineered office chair. However, with a price tag that, while not cheap, is easier to bear, a trip to your local Ikea store and a look at the Joakim swivelling office may convince you that it's a better buy.

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Make a font

Using a tool like High Logic's Font Creator (www.high-logic.com/fontcreator.html) it is easy to create your own font. All you need do is to write a sample of the letters to include in your font on a sheet of plain white paper, scan it and open the scanned image in your graphic software. Select around the first letter and copy and paste it into the appropriate glyph box in the software. The software takes care of most of the work of creating the character outlines for you and the help information steps you through the process from configuring each character to saving and installing the font file.

With the shareware trial version you can make a custom handwriting font for anyone to use. Make one for a friend – all they need to do is to give you a sample of their handwriting. With an hour or so of work you can make a custom font and burn it to a disk ready for gift wrapping – don't forget to give them instructions for installing it if they're unsure. It's a thoughtful gift and I'm willing to bet no one else will be giving the same one.

Make a photo book

A photo book is like a custom photo album but easier to make than you might think. You can make one from your own photos, from photos that you have purchased from an online source such as iStockphoto.com or from someone else's photo collection. A photo book makes a wonderful gift idea. You can purchase the books and software you need to create them and some options include Epson's StoryTeller which is a book and software combination (<http://tinyurl.com/u7mod>) and My Photo Book Creator which is software and a binding solution from (www.myphotobookcreator.com). On a smaller and simpler level there is ZoomAlbum (www.zoomalbum.net) which is a package with software and three small albums.

With any of these products you simply assemble the photos into a layout, using the software if this is included, and then print the pages on the paper supplied. Fold the pages and bind them into the special book. In some cases you can add text and images to the pages so you can create some very detailed and descriptive albums. With ZoomAlbum the album is quite small so you won't have room for much more than the photos and a few captions. Make photo books for your family from your own photos or make one for someone special to commemorate a special event in their lives such as an anniversary or trip.

Make a calendar

Calendars make a great gift any time of the year and as a seasonal gift, create a 12 or 14 month calendar. You can do this from inside a program such as Microsoft Word using the Calendar Wizard. If you don't

have it installed you can download it from here: <http://tinyurl.com/yanplk>. Run the wizard to create a calendar for months you select – it will add placeholders for photos on the calendar pages that you can replace with your photos – it doesn't look like it does on the download site but there is an images option in

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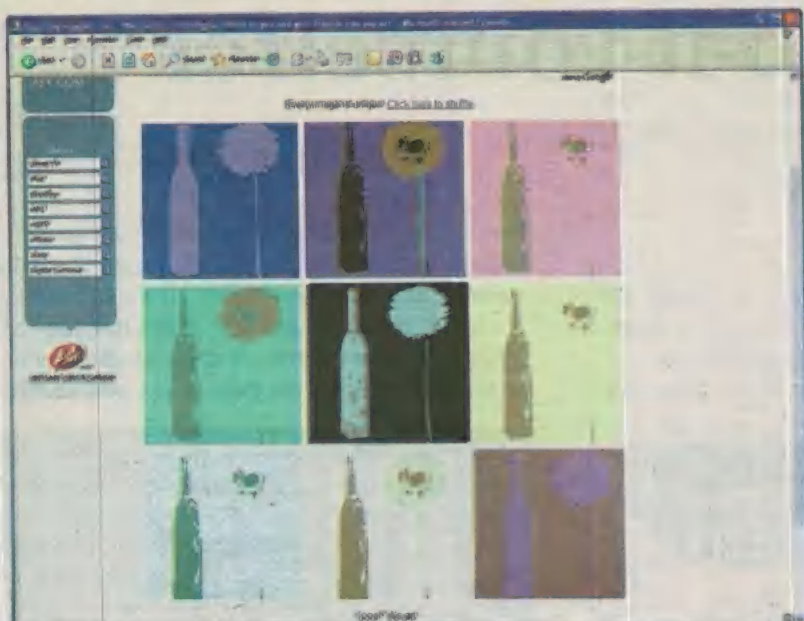
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Turn a simple photo into a piece of frameable wall art using the free online Warholizer service.



Make a calendar incorporating photos you have taken as a personal seasonal gift.

the wizard. To add your images, select the image placeholder and insert your own photo, crop and size it to fit the space allowed. Create a cover for the calendar using an image of your choice, print the pages and have it spiral bound at your local copy shop. If you're a keen photographer, use photos you have taken yourself to illustrate your calendar.

Customizable products

There are plenty of customizable items you can buy and to which you can add your photos and other imagery. These items include key rings as well as pens and frames such as PixPen and the MagnaFrame. You can also purchase customizable travel mugs from <http://thepicturemug.com>. All these products can be decorated using pho-

tos from your collection or using other elements you have created on your computer. Simply download a template from the manufacturer's web site if there is one, print the page and trim to the template size before inserting into the object.

Items like pens and travel mugs make great gifts for your business to give to key customers and suppliers as well as great personal seasonal gifts.

Photos as art

If you are keen digital photographer make the most of your own images. With a little work you can make them into one of a kind home décor items. To do this, choose the best of your images that are appropriate to the taste of your recipient and adjust and crop the image using your favourite photo software. Print the image onto high quality photo paper and then frame it. Keep in mind that small photographs in large frames look very artistic and black and white often looks much better than colour.

An excellent framing solution is to purchase a good looking pre-made frame from a frame or craft store. Buy one much larger than the photo and have them cut a mat especially for the photo. Alternately, purchase a mat cutter and mat board and learn to do it yourself. The Logan Compact Mat Cutter, for example, will pay for itself with the first few mats you cut and it isn't difficult to do. An alternative solution is to take photos of retro household objects like kettles, phones and kitchen items. Create Warhol style artwork from these using your own software or upload the image to <http://bighugelabs.com/flickr/warholizer.php> and make one there. Print the art and adhere the images to artists' canvas (which you can purchase at an art store) using gel medium. Two or three canvases created using a similar theme and style make a very smart gift.

By Helen Bradley



Being cheap without being Scrooge

Open-source and free gifts for the holidays

Public domain music

www.archive.org

Whether you're looking for a song to include in a compilation disc that you'll send out along with (or perhaps as) your family Christmas card or for sheet music that can be performed in public with indemnity, you'll need to be looking in the "public domain." Public domain is a tricky place to be though and individual countries have their own rules for what exactly constitutes works that are public domain. The US copyright standard states that any copyrighted works produced before January 1, 1923 is in the public domain. Section 6 of the Canadian Copyright Act states that work passes in to public domain 50 years from the copyright holder's death; a song whose copyright holder died in 1957 entered the public domain this year, for example. You can also look for songs that are made available through the Creative Commons or other such free public use, generally taken to include distribution in a non-commercial form (like your holiday music CD card), provided a copy of the Creative Commons license comes right along with it, i.e. as a text file included in a session of your holiday disc. Sources are all over the map from the geographically far flung to the personal

site to the commercial and steps in between. A good place to start is the list of 235 Christmas songs made available through the Creative Commons license at Uwe Hermann's blog at: www.hermann-uwe.de/ Special mention has to go to the artist collective The 8bitpeoples (www.8bitpeoples.com) whose truly colossal online discography of music squeezed out of low-bit electronics like the NES, Atari ST, Gameboy and the venerable Commodore 64 includes "The 8 Bits of Christmas," published-like all their work-under CC.

Free operating system

www.ubuntu.com

Open source offers the perfect opportunity for gifts on the cheap. Make that on the less-than-cheap or free. The only cost associated with grabbing an operating system for you and yours goes to the media you'll need to purchase to give the gift and perhaps on ink and paper if you're creating a fancy customized CD case (see "free wrapping").

This gift can be as simple as scoring the latest ISO of Ubuntu (7.10, available from www.ubuntu.com) and



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burning a dozen copies or it may involve some research to find what computer architecture your friends and family are using. The basic version of Ubuntu 7.10, developed under the codename Gutsy Gibbon, is designed to run on the vast majority of PCs based on x86 architecture (read: most Intel and comparable processors including AMD). There are versions designed for 64bit AMD and Intel processors too, along with Sun UltraSPARC systems. There are earlier versions of the operating system designed to run on pre-Intel Mac processors (PowerPC).

A copy of the general install disc is a nice gift and offers the benefit of allowing recipients to toss the disc into their system to check it out without actually installing anything. However, a customized install with some great free software included in the install (and perhaps even some Christmasy wallpaper on the desktop) is nicer still. This can be as simple as downloading Xubuntu for friends whose computers may not be quite up to the task of running Ubuntu with all its power and eye candy or Edubuntu for families with school-aged children. However, going a step further and working within an existing Linux system, you can create completely customized bootable discs with a range of applications pre-installed by following reasonably simple tutorials online and / or with the Ubuntu Customization Kit (uck.sourceforge.net/)

Free software

Trawling the net for "free" software can be risky business. In among the real gems, software that costs nothing and is supported by donations and kept alive by a dedicated community offering the software, in part, to get people interested in the open source

movement, there are programs that, while the price tag may be zero, they're not free of spyware, malware and other kinds of .*.ware. Doing the research and creating a CD full of installable software that is free, both in the sense that it costs nothing and in that it is free from malicious software be it advertising, trackers, installers or whatever.

A little searching and research however can help you to create a value packed application installer disc for you and yours. Some suggestions for inclusion in your installer disc:

OpenOffice.org 2.3

www.openoffice.org

Windows, Linux, Mac OSX, Solaris

A free suite of office productivity applications that look after a ton of office and student tasks. The package is a ~105MB download and includes:

Writer: As the name suggests, this is a well featured word processing application. Unlike many cheap and free word processors, Writer includes many of the features and functions that you'd miss otherwise were you to ditch the paid alternative.

Calc: A powerful spreadsheet tool that lets you create reports, tabulate and analyze data and create charts and other graphical aids for use in presentations and reports.

Impress: Impress creates effective multimedia presentations quickly and with minimal hassle. It's a surprisingly well featured free alternative.

Draw: Pretty self explanatory; allows for the creation of fairly simple diagrams and some limited 3D stuff for use in presentations.

Base: A database management and querying tool; not of much use to general users but indispensable to those that use it.

Math: An easier way to create mathematical strings and formulas that can be pulled directly in to Writer (or indeed many of the other OOo applications). An excellent resource for college and university students too.

GIMPShop

www.gimpshop.com

An open source and incredibly powerful image editing applications that rivals Photoshop in its features. For Photoshop users, it would prove a difficult transition to make. However, for those just starting out in image editing, it's a worthwhile program to learn.

Pidgin

www.pidgin.im

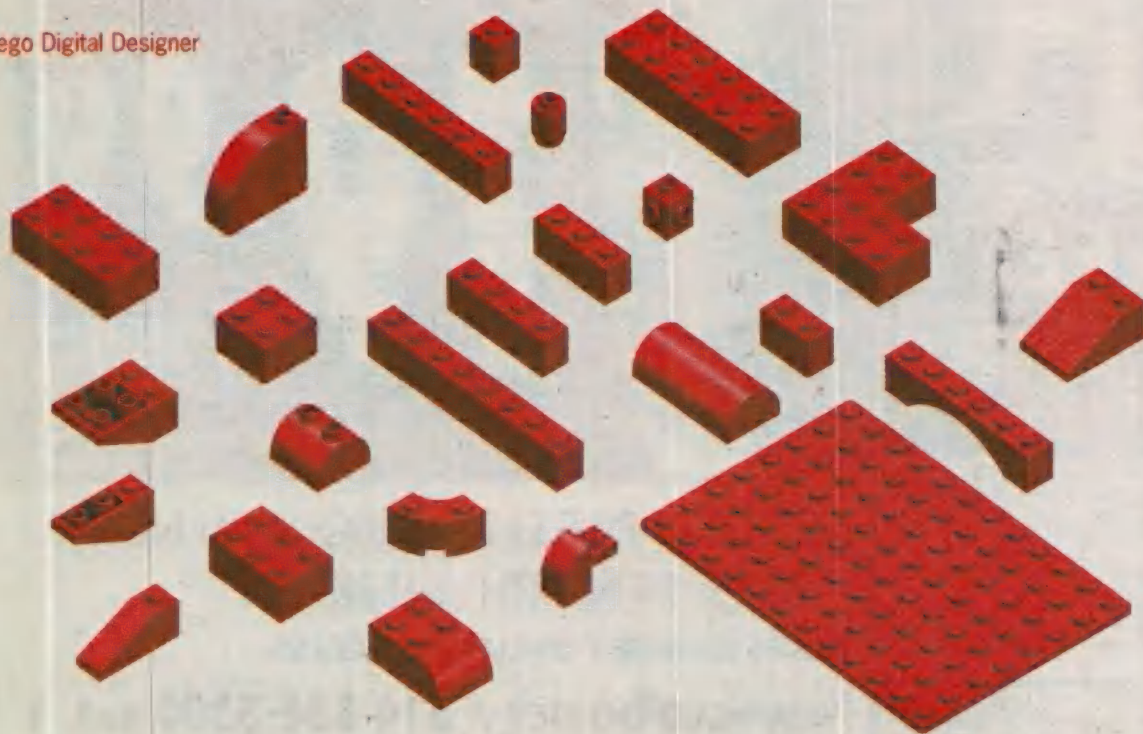
A cross-client IM program that offers one interface for the vast majority of your IM accounts along with merged contact lists. Among its long list of supported IM protocols are AIM, MSN, IRC, Google Talk, ICQ, Yahoo!, MySpaceIM and others.

There are plenty of other free programs to peruse and choose. Some good examples are: Audacity (audacity.sourceforge.net), a fairly powerful but simple sound recording application; Inkscape (www.inkscape.org), a vector graphics app; RSSOwl (www.rssowl.org), a consolidated RSS feed reader, Mozilla's Firefox (www.mozilla.com/firefox) browser and Thunderbird (www.mozilla.com/thunderbird) email client; DarkRoom (<http://jjafuller.com/v1/node/4>), a no frills word processor that mimics old green on black word processing to keep you focused on the task at hand.

Free games

There are tons of free games out there for the taking. Offering a CD of web links to places to play free games though isn't a very nice gift and demonstrates that you only started thinking about Christmas presents on the eve of the day. A little extra care and forethought is what makes the difference between "cheap" and "thoughtful."

Lego Digital Designer



Lego Digital Designer

ldd.lego.com

Windows, Mac OSX

What geek doesn't love Lego? The plastic blocks with the raised nubly thingies and the according nubly receptacles are totally binary and allow you to make a structure that is both sound and creative. Can't argue with that. What isn't fun is the cleaning up of blocks after the fact. It's Lego that has come up with the best solution to the biggest problem with Lego, and it involves going virtual. Lego Digital Designer gives players the option of creating a model or landscape entirely from scratch or to select from a series of pre-built model foundations and go from there. You can save out projects and start a new one without ever having to dismantle a particular model in order to grab a brick that you need, thus solving the other biggest problem with Lego.

Perhaps the coolest feature is the same feature that makes this a commercially viable proposition for Lego. Once you've finished building your model, you can

upload it to the Lego Store for display in a gallery and to purchase a kit (along with instructions) for re-creating your opus in real-life with real Lego bricks. Sweet.

Frets on Fire

fretsonfire.sourceforge.net

Windows, MacOSX, Linux

Frets on Fire sees users hitting the F1-F5 buttons (by default) on the keyboard while slamming the enter key to pick; it's a surprisingly well put together free Guitar Hero clone and, with the appropriate tinkering, can even be configured to work with the Guitar Hero controllers.

It's open source too, published under the GNU license, which means the community is free to add on to the game. And add on they have. There are mods for the game that change the way it looks, from the slightly sterile default look to the some very creative graphical



overhauls many of which, it must be noted, look an awful lot like FoF's inspiration. There are capo mods to change the key, theme mods that change everything from the background to the fretboard, amp mods, crowd mods and sound mods (like Simpsons sounds or Spongebob sounds). The game can import songs from its inspiration: Guitar Hero I and II from RedOctane... with some patience as it's a laborious process.

Soldat

www.soldat.pl

Windows

A game that's taken on a life of its own, Soldat has been around for quite a while and has built a pretty large fan following and community that creates mods and maps for the game. There are hundreds of mods available to keep the game fresh.

It's an online, 2D shooter with ragdoll physics and tons of game modes. Players jump around the four-way scrolling maps in teams and take out the opposing forces. Game modes include capture the flag, team match, deathmatch, point match, infiltration and more. Of particular note is Rambomatch mode; Rambo's iconic bow is dropped somewhere on the map and the player that finds it gains special powers and can regenerate health; only Rambo can score points during Rambomatch so all other players must hunt down and dispatch the powered-up player and

then squabble over the bow. Friends become enemies pretty quickly in this game...

Free wrapping

www.papercdcase.com

Nothing says "Happy Holidays" quite like a CD case you folded with your own hands. Especially if it says "Happy Holidays" on it.

Most of the gifts in this guide require burning on CD or DVD and creating a homebrew case for your homebrew compilations is a perfect complement. A quick visit to www.papercdcase.com and you'll be able to insert a holiday message, choose from a few different graphics (nothing holiday related, unfortunately) and export the result as a PDF with all the necessary folding marks printed to make putting the whole thing together much easier. Once you get the hang of creating these CD cases, you can start to create your own using printed pages or wrapping paper, in keeping with the festive feel.

By Andrew Moore-Crispin

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Digital Photography Tutorial

Home made Christmas cards? Why not?

Greeting cards have become such a signature item for this time of year, it would be hard to imagine a Christmas season without 'em decorating the mantle, cubicle or lunchroom.

One of the first projects that many digital photographers tackle is the greeting card. And why not? It's a way of adding a personal touch to a common item, and there's a whole sub-industry to support you in this endeavour. Many image editors include greeting card templates that make it easy to create cards with your inkjet printer. Office supply stores and hobby craft outlets include a range of pre-folded blank cards with matching envelopes. Sometimes these paper products include greeting card software that's pre-configured to work with the paper. The biggest challenge you may face is selecting the right image.

There are no rules but maybe some conventions and categories that will inform your choices. Most people expect winter scenes on greeting cards this time of year, but you don't have to use one. If you spent last Christmas on a tropical holiday you could resurrect some of those pics with a clever caption.

For winter scenes, photos of local scenery and landmarks make a good choice. For cards going to people who are from - or at least know - the area, it will add a measure of nostalgia and maybe a gentle message of "wish I were there."

But you don't have to limit yourself to local landmarks. Generic scenes have universal appeal too. If you have a birdhouse in your backyard, a close-up of it with snow piled high on the tiny roof can also make an endearing subject for a photo. Likewise, if you stroll

through a public park after a heavy snowfall, you'll find evergreen trees wearing a coat of white. Admittedly this subject is overdone to the point of being hackneyed, but photography is as much about finding new ways to photograph common subjects as it is about finding new subjects to photograph. If you can bring a fresh perspective to a common theme, more power to you. Nevertheless, with such generic subjects, there's always the risk of the recipient not being able to distinguish your work of art from the 10 for a buck cards from the discount store.

On the other hand, if you use a greeting card image that's a family photo, no one will mistake it as a dollar store item. For some, this is the best reason for making one's own greeting cards - it's truly unique.

Family pics on a greeting card also serve a social communication function. In our mobile society, friends and family can easily be spread from coast to coast, so it's a way of sharing the progression of our lives with the people we care about but don't regularly see. And it doesn't have to just be about the human members of the family. A snap of the family pet can create a whimsical card too. Or maybe even a serious one - pet portraiture is actually a huge commercial business, but that's another story.

There may be times when you don't want to use blank card stock - maybe there's a paper with a special texture, finish or weight that you'd rather use. This can present a problem, especially with heavier cards, of how to make a neat fold. If you go to a crafts or scrap booking store you might be able to find a special tool called a bone folder. The name comes from the fact

that the ones professional bookbinders use are actually made of bone, but you can find less expensive ones made of Teflon that will do the trick. These will be shaped roughly like a knife blade with a blunt tip. Using a straight edge you score your card where you want the fold to be with the blunt tip, making a little crease. Then you use the blade part to turn the card onto itself and the paper will fold along the crease, creating a perfect factory fold rather than a lumpy, uneven one that screams home-made.

Another solution is not to make a fold at all. Just make it a single small sheet, like a postcard. You can buy an inexpensive paper cutter that will allow you to trim the cards neatly to a common size. A paper cutter is also handy if you want to bleed your photos off the edge of the card. Rather than relying on the print-to-edge function of your printer which may not work predictably, or if your printer doesn't support edge to edge printing, you can make your print with the normal white border, then trim the border off with the paper cutter.

Computer layout software and digital photography have really given a boost to personal card making. And you don't have to stop there. Many families write year-in-review letters that go out to a small number of friends and family. You can make a multi-page greeting card-size booklet using inexpensive layout software or even a word processor like Pages on the Mac and combine the greeting card with the Yearly Greetings From the [insert your name here] Household.

Happy card making!

By David Tanaka



YouTube launches Canadian portal

A new take on Can con?

In a decidedly online answer to "Can con," YouTube officially launched its Canadian portal at www.youtube.ca in Toronto recently.

Canadian YouTube addicts can get their fix by either logging in to the global portal at YouTube.com or to the specifically Canadian site. Canadian traffic will not be automatically routed to the Canadian page and the company has no current plans to route traffic said Sakina Arsiwala, International Manager for YouTube at the launch press conference in downtown Toronto.

The site puts a "Canadian lens" on YouTube content said International Product Manager Luis Garcia and is an opportunity for Canadian uploaders to get in front of a Canadian audience. All content, whether uploaded to YouTube.ca or to YouTube.com will still be available through the global portal and all global video is likewise available to Canadian viewers.



LaCie wins design awards

More accolades for innovative industrial design

We've always thought that LaCie's products brought a little extra style to the often drab beige tech landscape, and we're not alone. The company has been awarded two 2008 Design Observer accolades from the Agency for the Promotion of Industrial Creation (APCI) based in France.

The LaCie "flower vase" USB/Firewire combination hub, by French design house Ora-ïto won a 2008 Design Observer Award while a set of Firewire speakers by designer Neil Poulton has won a 2008 Design Observer Star award. This year, over 160 products were selected for awards, and 39 of those were given Design Observer Star awards.

Last year LaCie scooped up three 2007 APCI awards as well as a couple of Janus 2007 awards from the French Institute of Design.

Simply Accounting 2008

Accounting options from entrepreneur to enterprise

Accounting software was one of the first justifications for a small business to get a computer. One of the first, and habitually best-selling products of that type is Simply Accounting, a made-in-Canada product now owned by the multinational Sage Software, which has introduced the 2008 Simply Accounting family.

Sage has simplified the product lineup, now there are four versions: Simply Accounting Entrepreneur, Simply Accounting by Sage 2008, Simply Accounting by Sage Premium Accounting 2008 and Simply Accounting by Sage Enterprise 2008.

A nod to its strong Canadian base, the products continue to offer bilingual features and support multiple currencies. Sage says the main screen has been redesigned for easier navigation and access to the software's modules. As well, it now incorporates a MySQL database, and improved reporting features including print to PDF.

Simply Accounting single-user has a suggested retail price of \$149 or \$349 with the payroll module. Simply Accounting Premium two-user is priced at \$249 or \$449 with payroll. These two are available from a variety of retailers. Simply Accounting Enterprise is available directly from Sage Software, with a five-user license available for \$1,249, and a ten-user license for \$2,499.

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www.nyt.ca

A personalized CD from Toronto-based Names Your Tunes will delight any youngster with 13 songs sung just for him or her. The songs are recorded individually for each name, which makes a huge difference in the quality of this CD compared to others that may use automatic name insertion software, with about 3200 names currently available. It's also an excellent compilation of kid-friendly tunes. Name Your Tunes donates a portion of its sales to Hear Here, a non-profit charitable foundation for children administered through The Hospital For Sick Children.



Washable Mouse

Belkin

Ages 3+ \$39.99

www.belkin.com

Not exactly designed for kids, but definitely sticky-finger-friendly, this water-resistant mouse can be hand-washed under a faucet. It's powered through the USB cable and will work on all type of surfaces, including upholstery and wood.



Smart Cycle

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Ages 3-6 \$130

www.fisher-price.com

Kids learn about spelling, counting and shapes while getting some much-needed exercise with this stationary bike that plugs into your TV. Lessons in problem solving, spatial reasoning, matching and creativity are provided on screen while kids pedal through different learning environments. They can also play arcade games on the joystick or race a second player. The Smart Cycle comes with Learning Journey Software. Additional themes are sold separately, such as Dora's Jungle Safari, Sponge Bob's Ocean Adventures, Hot Wheels and Barbie.



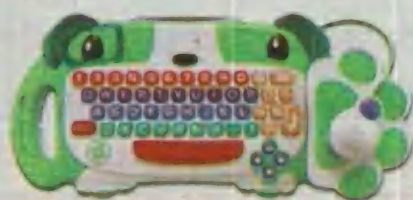
ClickStart My First Computer

Leapfrog

Ages 3-6 \$69.99

www.leapfrog.ca

Prepare your little ones with the computer skills they'll need for kindergarten class with this introductory computer from Leapfrog. The system consists of a cartridge console that plugs into your TV, wireless keyboard and convertible right/left-handed mouse. It comes with five games that teach basic colours, shapes, numbers, letters, phonics and math. Parents can also leave messages in an "inbox" to teach basic email skills.



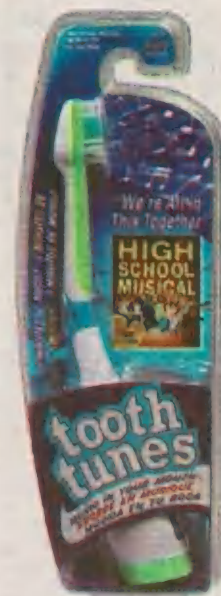
Digital Arts & Crafts Studio

Fisher-Price

Ages 4-9 \$64.99

www.fisher-price.com

Little designers-in-the-making can create, save and print their artwork using this child-friendly tablet with its own stylus and creativity tools. The tablet plugs into your computer's USB port and comes with colouring pages, storybooks, greeting cards and stationary. Additional craft kits can be purchased separately.



increase the pressure of their brushing to increase the volume of the song. Each toothbrush houses one two-minute song clip and runs on three AAA batteries. Artists include Hilary Duff, The Black Eyed Peas, Destiny's Child, Kelly Clarkson, KISS and a song from High School Musical.

Rubik's Revolution

Techno Source

Ages 5+ US\$19.99

www.rubiksrevolution.com

A high-tech version of the old classic, the Rubik's Revolution houses six electronic games with multiplayer functionality and comes complete with lighting and sound effects. You might even want to pick up one for yourself.



Password Journal

Mattel

Ages 6+ \$34.99

www.radicagames.com

Your little girl can safely store all her secrets in this voice-activated journal that will only open to the sound of her own voice. Voice prompts also control the light, clock and calendar. She can also record and play back personal messages. The device operates on three AAA batteries.



Toothtunes Toothbrush

Hasbro

Ages 5+ \$12.99

www.hasbro.com/toothtunes

Toothtunes toothbrushes encourage a full, two-minute brush twice a day by streaming sound vibrations of the latest pop chart hits through the bristles. Kids



Barbie Girls

Mattel

Ages 6+ \$74.99

www.barbie.ca

Barbie enters the digital age in the form of a customizable, doll-shaped MP3 player that can hold up to 120 MP3 (or 240 WMA) files. The "doll" also works as a USB key to unlock hidden areas of BarbieGirls.ca. Plugged into a USB port, the device will allow your little girl to shop, play and chat with friends.

Nintendo DS Brain Age 2 Bundle

Nintendo DS

Ages 8+ \$149.99

www.nintendo.ca

This limited edition bundle includes the Crimson/Black Nintendo DS handheld game system, a Nintendo DS carrying case and Brain Age 2: More Training in Minutes a Day (the second edition of Nintendo's hit game for mental exercise, rated E for Everyone). Fifteen activities are included, designed to stimulate the brain and challenge skills such as memory, math and language. The Nintendo DS is available in several other colours for \$139.99 from Toysrus.ca, where Brain Age 2 is also sold separately for \$14.97.



Xbox 360 Arcade Console

Microsoft

Ages 8+ \$299.99 www.xbox.com/ca

Microsoft's Arcade Console is geared specifically to families and comes with the Xbox 360 console, a wireless controller, 256MB memory unit, composite AV cable, HDMI connection, Xbox Live Silver membership and five family-friendly games: PAC-MAN Championship Edition, Feeding Frenzy, Uno, Luxor 2 and Boom Boom Rocket.

Robopanda

WowWee

Ages 8+ US\$169.99

www.robopandaonline.com

Replace that imaginary friend with a robotic one. WowWee's latest creation plays games, tells stories and sings songs with life-like gestures and facial expressions. Built-in sound and touch sensors provide a "living skin" that allows the Robopanda to interact with children without a remote. He comes with two activity and story cartridges (additional cartridges are sold separately) and a stuffed animal friend, called Teddy. Robopanda stands about 19-inches tall and operates on six C batteries and four AA batteries.



Cool Stuff 2.0 and How It Works

ISBN: 978 075 663 2076

Ages 10+ \$29.99

www.dk.com

DK Publishing has released its second "Cool Stuff" title in its classic microscopic, macro-photographed, x-rayed, cross-sectioned and thermal-imaged fashion. Teaching kids the science behind all the latest gadgets and technology, this hardcover, 256-page book covers topics such as HDTV, biometric passports and Bluetooth. With books like this, no wonder fifth graders stay smarter.



FLY Fusion Pentop Computer

Leapfrog

Ages 10-16 \$79.99

www.flyworld.com

Straight-A kids will enjoy this sophisticated camera-based pen, which works with special dot matrix paper to convert handwritten notes into digital text documents, emails and jpeg images. The new model comes with 128MB internal memory, PC connectivity and is 25 per cent smaller than the original released last year. Notebooks are sold separately.

for about \$10 each. Homework and entertainment applications are also available separately, covering topics such as math, algebra, writing and French translation.

By Jennifer Kavur



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Optek Fretlight

data will be scrambled and the innards of the Ironkey will be rendered permanently inoperable. Your company secrets are safe! The Ironkey is available in 1, 2 and 4GB capacities. Initial setup is Windows only, but once it's set up it can also be used with the Mac.

MicroNet Platinum NAS

\$739 and up

www.micronet.com

For the geek who's always looking for more storage, MicroNet has the PlatinumNAS, a network hard drive with four user-accessible (and hot-swappable) hard drives that can be configured in a RAID 0, 1 or 5 configuration. While the PlatinumNAS can be configured as a straight-ahead network drive, it can also be set up as an FTP server, an iTunes server, an unattended Bittorrent client, and a printer-sharing device. A 1TB configuration will run \$739, but those with a true hunger for storage can get the 4TB model for \$2,349. Yow. Works with Windows, Mac and Linux.

Optek Fretlight

\$500

www.fretlight.com

For the budding musician who wants to take up guitar (Guitar Hero doesn't count) but just can't figure out where to place their fingers, there's the Fretlight. While it looks like a pretty basic electric guitar, the Fretlight can also be connected via USB to a Windows computer, and when you run the lesson plan software, small LEDs located in the guitar's fretboard will light up to show you where your fingers are supposed to be placed. The good news is that the guitar actually plays well, and there's no indication of the LED lights when it's not plugged into the computer - which means you

can still use it as your regular axe once you've learned where your fingers go. There are acoustic models available, as well as vintage and "pro" electric models.

Stanton T.90 USB

\$299

www.stantondj.com

Sometimes it's a mixed-up world for those who straddle the divide between the analogue and the digital age: while digital music is extremely convenient, there's still something about a good old vinyl album that is hard to beat. While there are certainly cheaper USB turntables available, they lack the street cred that Stanton brings to the table as a manufacturer of DJ turntables. Not only can the T.90 USB be used to convert your old wax to MP3, but this direct-drive turntable can actually be used for spinning live, or as a high-quality turntable for your home stereo setup. Even better: as a child of the digital age, the T.90 even allows you to adjust the speed of your track while keeping the pitch constant. Can you do that with your iPod? Didn't think so. The included music editing software is designed to work with Windows, but the turntable itself will work with either Windows or Mac.

Star Trek Original Series Season One HD DVD

\$195 (or less)

www.startrek.com

Recently re-released to television with new digital effects added, the original Star Trek series now makes it to the world of HD-DVD. While purists may blanch at this updated version of the classic series, the stories are still intact and now the quality is upgraded for high definition televisions. For those who haven't moved up

Stanton T.90 USB



Looking for a gift for the geek in your life? Whether you're shopping for a music geek, a computer geek, or a general all-around geek, we've got the goods.

Ironkey

\$79 and up

www.ironkey.com

For the ultimate in portable data security, look no further than the Ironkey. Not only does the Ironkey feature hardware-level encryption of your data, but the USB drive's metal casing protects it from crushing or water damage. For the truly paranoid, it's also tamper-proof: if someone tries to enter the wrong password ten times in a row, or tries to physically force it open, the



Blade Runner Ultimate Collector's Edition



Star Trek Original Series Season One

to HD-DVD, the whole set is in combo format, which means it will play back on an old-school DVD player too.

Blade Runner Ultimate Collector's Edition (Blu-ray/HD-DVD) \$113

<http://bladerunnerthemovie.warnerbros.com>

The movie Blade Runner has a rabid cult following and an amazing critical legacy... and a history of studio intervention and artistic compromises. Now, to coincide with the cinematic release of Ridley Scott's new Final Cut version of this classic, Warner Bros has re-released the movie on high definition DVD, in various configurations to suit the viewers' level of fanaticism. The ultimate version comes with five Blu-ray or HD-DVD discs and includes all of the different versions of the movie previously released, as well as a lot of bonus material. And if that wasn't enough, it also comes in a collector's suitcase crammed with additional goodies, including a spinner car, an origami piece, and a letter from Ridley Scott.

Dremel Driver \$100

www.dremel.com

You may know Dremel for its line of cutting tools, incredibly popular in the physical modding community, but the company has also put its torque to another use with the Dremel Driver. This cordless power screwdriver is so small it fits right into the palm of your hand, which makes it ideal for use both outside and inside a computer case. It comes with a charging stand that has divots for holding any screws you remove, as well as a special holster for the eight included driver bits.

SCOTTeVEST Ultimate Hoodie Microfleece \$70

www.scottevest.com

One of the big challenges for people who love technology is carrying their tech toys around without it being obvious. SCOTTeVEST is our favourite tech clothing company, precisely because they make clothing with pockets for all your gadgets, while keeping the majority of those pockets hidden away. The Ultimate Hoodie Microfleece has eleven

pockets, some of them tucked away inside other pockets, and it includes channels for hiding away your headphone wires, a keyfob, and other such ways to manage your technology without looking like you've joined the Borg.

Matrox TripleHead2Go Digital Edition \$299

www.matrox.com

Canadian graphics company Matrox has been a bit quiet on the consumer front for a while, but it's recently released a few products that deserve the attention of notebook users. The TripleHead2Go is a quick and relatively painless way to turn a single monitor port into a triple monitor configuration, provided your graphics card can handle a display that's three times the regular width. It works best with three matched displays—so a mix-and-match approach may not be a winning combination—and it does require a free USB port for power. But for notebook users who are currently struggling with a single LCD display, the extra screen real estate that the TripleHead2Go opens up may be well worth it. Works with both Windows and Mac; a full list of compatible systems is available at the Matrox website.

By Sean Carruthers

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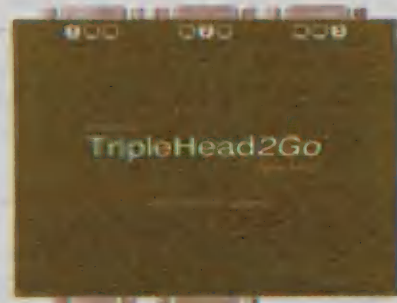
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Matrox TripleHead2Go Digital Edition



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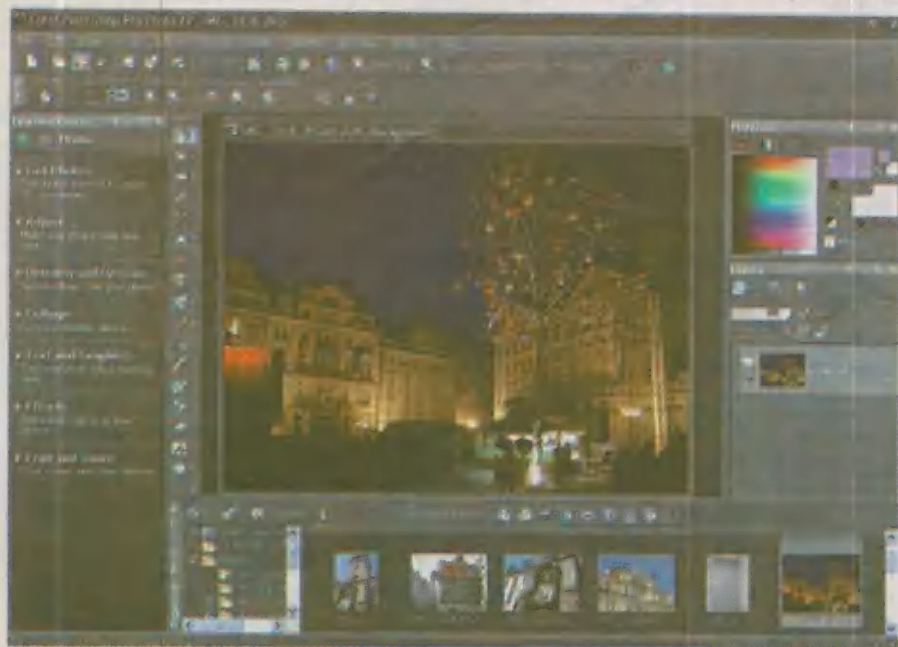
From lightrooms and darkrooms to computer rooms

Budget SLRs

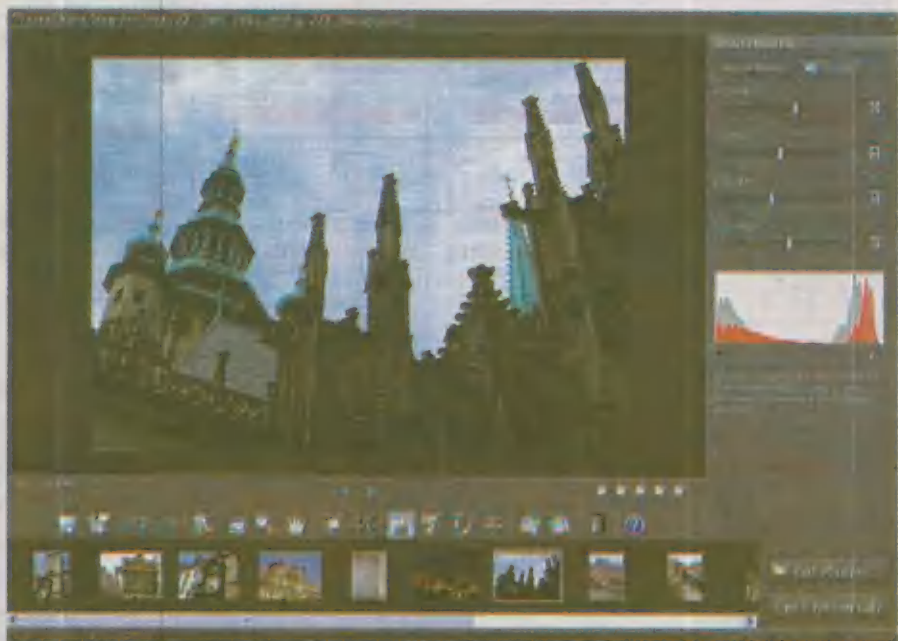
Point and shoot or single lens reflex? Where point and shoots still outshine the SLR are in the areas of weight and bulk, cost and simplicity – point and shoot is a true description for many of these, so you don't need to get involved in the technical minutiae to have an enjoyable and productive time taking pictures. Because they can be so tiny, they can also be readily at hand, compared to SLRs which can be a bit of a production to haul around everywhere.

Nevertheless, single lens reflex cameras have been the fastest growing segment for the camera industry. SLRs offer a couple of benefits. First the sensor is larger than what you find on a camera with a fixed lens. An 8MP SLR will most likely have superior image quality to that of a 10MP point-and-shoot for this reason, which will be important mainly if you want to make large prints of your images. There is also the benefit of interchangeable lenses. While some fixed-lens cameras offer 12x zooms with excellent telephoto range, these invariably are less impressive at the wide angle end of things. For dramatic eye-grabbing wide angle shots, an SLR equipped with an ultrawide lens has no equal.

Budget is a relative term, but in the context of the SLR we can set the ceiling at \$1,000 and have plenty to choose from. In fact, you can find models with lens included starting at around \$600. The Canon EOS Digital Rebel XT is an 8MP model



Adobe Lightroom



Wacom Bamboo



that has been superseded by the 10MP XTi but it's still available for around \$650 including a basic Canon 18-55 zoom lens. Likewise the writing's on the wall for the 6MP Nikon D40 since the 10MP D40x showed up earlier this year, but the D40 is still being advertised at many retailers for \$600 including a basic 18-55 Nikkor zoom lens. The 6MP Pentax K100D with 18-55 Pentax lens is going for around \$600 too.

If you crave the latest 10MP SLR, you can still buy into the technology for less than a grand. Perhaps the best bargain in this bunch is the diminutive Olympus E-410 two lens kit. For as low as \$800 you get the E-410 and two Olympus lenses that give you a focal length range of 28-300 mm (in 35mm camera terms). The previously mentioned 10MP Canon Digital Rebel XTi and Nikon D40X as well as the Sony A-100 and Olympus E-510 (also 10MP) sell for \$800-\$950 with one basic zoom lens. The 10MP Pentax K10 with lens squeaks under our ceiling at \$999 from one retailer. (Prices derived from online stores of several Canadian camera retailers in mid-November.)

Camera Accessories

Get the white right

The auto white balance feature works quite well on most cameras but when you want really accurate colours, it's best to take a manual white balance reading. The problem is, often there isn't a pure neutral white or grey object you can take a reading against. Experienced photographers know to bring one along. You can buy standard neutral grey cards at a well-equipped photo store, but an interesting variation is Lastolite's EZBalance collapsible target that folds into a small pouch. It has grey on one side and white on the other and is available in a few sizes. ExpoDisk makes a line of white balancing devices that attaches to your lens like a filter. They are available in a variety of filter sizes.

Banish ugly spots

An ongoing problem with digital SLRs is the accumulation of dust on the sensor. This shows up as dark splotches on the image. Olympus pioneered a built-in sensor dust removal system on its SLRs, and now many other camera makers are adopting some kind of sensor dust removal system in their cameras, but for people with older cameras, removing sensor dust remains an annoying maintenance chore.

Lint-free swabs and very pure alcohol-based cleaning solutions have been the mainstay for sensor cleaning, but this process has gone electronic. For example, VisibleDust has a product called the Arctic Butterfly, which is a soft brush with an electrostatic charge, that will attract the dust lodged on the sensor.

Computer equipment for the digital darkroom

Software

In order to set up your computer to do digital photographic work, you used to need three or four different software applications: cataloguing software, an image editor,



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Gifts for the guys

Tech toys sure to make a man smile

APC 8 Outlet Surge Protector



Remember when men's gift guides featured essentials such as loincloths, stout wooden clubs, and those new-fangled 'wheel' thingamabobs? No? Then you're young enough to know that today's man has slightly more technologically-driven interests. The bad news? There's a lot of stuff out there. The good news? We've done the shopping for you.

Here then, is a selection of the most wanted, most interesting male-oriented, tech-oriented devices on the market, arranged so that the thriftiest among you should pay attention early.

Guard Your PC 8 Outlet Surge Protector APC \$35 www.apcc.com

A power bar (strip) gives the man in your life more outlets (and who among us doesn't need an outlet?), but it doesn't protect expensive electronics from spikes and locusts and all the other horrible things that may travel out of the wall. A surge protector does. There's no shortage of options out there, but APC's 8 Outlet Surge Protector offers eight nicely spaced outlets for power brick plugs, an impressively high energy rating of 1,770 Joules, a \$75,000 equipment warranty and phone/fax protection.

Flash and Dash Cruzer Micro USB Flash Drive 4GB Sandisk \$50 www.sandisk.com

Flash drives (aka USB drives, thumb drives) are won-

derful tools for those who regularly need to transport data of any sort. They're ridiculously tiny and incredibly durable, and the megabyte per dollar ratio has changed dramatically, especially in the last year. And if your guy has a car stereo with a USB line-in, he can connect a flash drive directly and instantly have access to the hundreds of tunes he downloaded to the drive. Sub-1GB flash drives are still available, but 2GB or 4GB models are the current sweet spot.

Sandisk's Cruzer Micro USB Flash Drive line is popular for their retractable USB ports, nifty LED flashers, and brand reliability. At a street price of \$50 or so, the 4GB model is both spacious and cost effective.

Cool Case Nine Hundred Antec \$100 www.antec.com

It may be marketed as a gamer's case but the Antec Nine Hundred is a manly piece of art just perfect for anyone who wants to look cool and keep cool.

Sporting three oversize 120mm cooling fans and a top-mounted 200mm monster fan, the Nine Hundred won't allow anything to overheat—including today's most demanding graphic cards. There's a tray on the top for an MP3 player to sit while recharging and a perforated front panel that not only looks macho, but also allows a pair of cool blue LEDs to shine through every time the PC is switched on.

Make Him Look Pretty QuickCam Pro 9000 Logitech \$129 www.logitech.com

Featuring a quality Carl Zeiss lens, HD (960 by 720) images, automatic low-light adjustments, and sturdy

mounting hardware, Logitech's QuickCam Pro 9000 will make those fuzzy webcam images of the past nothing but a bad memory. It integrates with pretty much any video chat / video conference software and offers a simple set-up and a simple or advanced calibration panel that makes sure guys get the best possible picture in whatever lighting conditions exist at the computer desk.

Network the Neighbourhood Meraki Wireless Network Meraki \$50 - \$200 (per repeater) www.meraki.com

Mesh networking is a decentralized form of networking where each node, be it PC or other device, is a self-contained relay station. It's an up and coming technology and Meraki Networks is at the forefront. With its Meraki Wireless Network, budding entrepreneurs can begin in their own home by plugging one of its "repeaters" to a broadband connection, and then add more indoor and outdoor units throughout nearby homes until they've reached everyone in the neighbourhood. Available only from Meraki.

Nice Mice MX Revolution Logitech \$149.95 MX Air Rechargeable Cordless Air Mouse Logitech \$189.95 www.logitech.com

Two of the slickest—and priciest—mice to be released this year hail from respected mouse manufacturer Logitech. Looking more like a fine onyx carving than a typical mouse, the MX Revolution delivers hyper-accurate tracking, long distance 2.4GHz cordless opera-

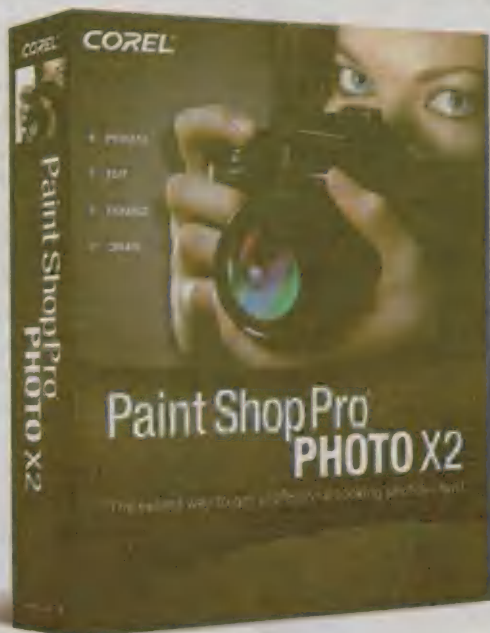
SanDisk Cruzer Micro



another piece of software to optimize your images for Web posting, etc. Today all those functions can be found in a single application that costs under \$150, such as Photoshop Elements or Corel Paint Shop Pro. These packages follow a digital workflow model that allows you to step through the process between taking the picture and showing it. Typically it's a four-step process: Intake, which includes downloading and image cataloguing; Development, which are basic alterations to colour and tonal balance, cropping and minor touch-ups like red-eye removal; Editing which involve more radical changes to the image, adding special effects, etc.; and Output, which is preparing images for final presentation on paper or a web site.

If you work with RAW image files, programs like Apple Aperture, Adobe Lightroom and ACDSee Pro make it as easy to work with RAW files as jpegs. For heavy-duty image editing, Photoshop CS3 is expensive but unmatched in power and features

Corel Paint Shop Pro Photo X2



Computer hardware add-ons

RAM: always a good bet

Image editors tend to be RAM hogs, so if your computer is of recent vintage bumping up RAM to two gigabytes will give you a noticeable performance boost, especially if you are running Windows Vista.

Tablets: because you weren't meant to draw with a brick

If you do a lot of image editing for special effects, photo restoration or extensive touching up, a graphics tablet will be your good buddy. Wacom is still the dominant brand in Canada, and the company recently added the Bamboo and Bamboo Fun to its product lineup. These are attractively styled, and are closer to Wacom's Graphire4 line than the high-end Intuos3 line, both in price and performance.

What you see is what you'll get

If you do a lot of inkjet printing of your photos and are always frustrated by the fact that what you see on your monitor isn't what you see in the print-out, a colour calibration system or at least a monitor calibration package may end those mysterious outcomes. There are a few products starting at around \$100, including the Pantone Huey, Gretag-Macbeth Eye-One, and ColorVision Spyder.

Stocking stuffers

Often low-cost, low-tech products prove to be very useful. A micro-fibre cleaning cloth for around 10 bucks tucks away in a camera bag and is great for keeping lenses smudge-free. Another simple but useful device is the air blower - a simple hand operated squeeze bulb with a nozzle at one end. These are better than the canned air devices, which can chill components and also tend to give out air blasts that are too strong.

By David Tanaka



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10 Current Promotion:

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*Some restrictions apply. Please call for details.



Introducing the new iMac

The all-new, all-in-one iMac packs a complete, high-performance computer into a beautifully thin design. Available in 20- and 24-inch widescreen models, it includes built-in wireless, Mac OS X, and the new iLife '08. So within minutes of opening the box, you'll be doing everything from sharing photos to creating movies to building websites. And it starts at just \$1299.

Now you can order Mac accessories online @ <http://www.dmac.ca>



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A gift for everyone

Finding the right charity this holiday season

Ease the stress, reduce the waste and avoid the awkwardness of gift giving this year by purchasing gifts through charities and not-for-profit organizations. By spending your money on a needy child or homeless animal, rather than a goofy sweater or silly gag book, you'll also truly embrace that spirit of giving the holidays are supposed to be about.

Charity-based gifts are great alternatives for people on your shopping list who insist you don't buy them anything, people who already have everything and people you don't know all too well but feel strangely compelled to buy something for. They are good in office settings, for example, when you draw a random co-worker's name out of a box and need to find a decent gift under \$10. They are a great option when you don't have a lot of money to spend, as a donation in any amount is always appreciated. They also send a nice "I'm thinking of you" message to acquaintances and long-distance friends while avoiding that uncomfortable "but I didn't get a gift for you" response.

Some organizations have online stores where you can purchase actual gifts just as if you were shopping in a regular store. Because the items were donated to the organization from another company, all the money you spend goes to support the charity. This is truly a win-win-win situation. Sick Kids Hospital (www.shopsickkids.com) and The Humane Society of Canada (www.humanesociety.com/online_adventure_store) both have such stores in place.

Another approach is the representative gift. You donate a certain amount of money and receive a small token in return, which you can still physically wrap and give. Again, the money goes to the cause, not the product.

The World Wildlife Fund Canada, for example, is selling holiday adoption kits for \$40 (www.wwf-store.ca), which consist of a tote containing a 12.5 cm stuffed animal, a personalized adoption certificate, a letter identifying you as the gift giver and a brochure that details the work your money will be supporting. You can select one out of ten threat-

ened species: polar bear, Asian elephant, leatherback turtle, giant panda, Arctic fox, orangutan, tiger, owl, snow leopard and orca. For each adoption, you receive a \$30 tax receipt.

There are also your standard donations, for which you receive some type of documentation and in most cases, a tax receipt. Non-materialistic types who have no use for an extra tee-shirt, keychain or even a button may appreciate this option the most.

If you don't have a particular organization in mind, eBay has a dedicated program for charity listings where you can buy items to support nonprofit organizations. More than 10,000 charities participate in eBay's Giving Works program (<http://givingworks.ebay.com>). You can search by keyword, product category or nonprofit organization, making it a great place to get started. Alternatively, you can begin your search under general headings such as children in need or global poverty. eBay marks certified nonprofit organizations with a ribbon symbol, ensuring their legitimacy.

Consumer electronics is a large category on the site, and you may find products you were already planning to purchase as gifts. By purchasing them through Giving Works, however, you will also be supporting a cause. Some examples of the products available include: iPod Sound System (benefiting Animal Rescue, Inc.), Polaroid 7" Portable DVD Player (benefiting the American Humane Society), Apple iPhone (benefiting the USO), 800W Beringer/Peavy Karaoke PA System (benefiting the Children's AID Foundation).

The next time someone asks you what you want for Christmas, instead of replying with that standard "nothing," suggest your favourite charity. It's one answer that won't feel awkward, and since the person asking will buy you a gift regardless, it minimizes your risk of receiving a tacky knick-knack and

ensures the money spent was put to good use.

By Jennifer Kavur



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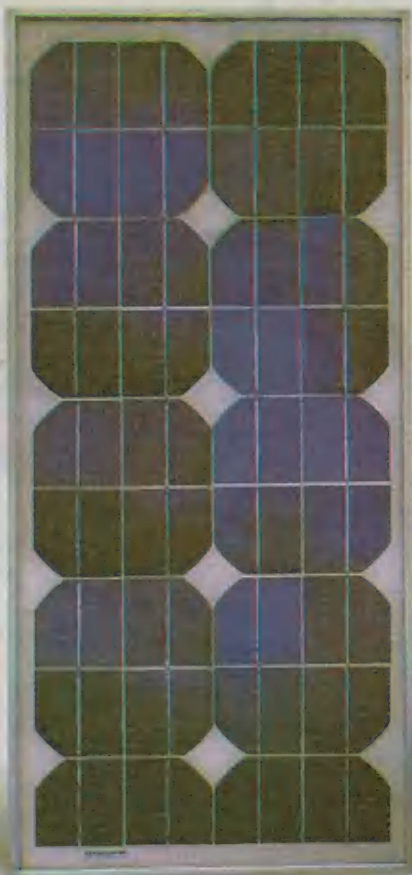
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A Harmonious Home

ZonePlayer ZP100

Sonos

\$650.00 (remote sold separately, bundles also available)

www.sonos.com

If your man has ever dreamed of converting the entire house into one big, fully customizable jukebox, the innovative Sonos Digital Music System may be just the ticket. To start, he merely places a Sonos "Zoneplayer" in the room of his choice. He then creates a wired or wireless connection to an existing digital music source (such as the PC in the den), adds a set of speakers, grabs the system's tricked-out full-color LCD remote control, and assembles a playlist from his music library. Best of all, he can set up multiple Sonos "zones" throughout or even outside the home, all connected to a single source yet each playing a unique set of songs that can be restructured at any time via that nifty portable remote.

By Gord Goble

tion, and a bevy of nifty one-click short-cut buttons and wheels. Even more esoteric is the phaser-like MX Air Rechargeable Cordless Air Mouse, a mouse that's equally at home being whipped through mid-air in the living room as it is on a desk. What man could resist?

The Swiss Army Knife of Telephones
GLOBARANGE BB-GT1540B
Panasonic \$179.99 www.panasonic.ca

The versatile cordless Panasonic GLOBARANGE BB-GT1540B is a regular landline phone and a digital answering machine. It features keypads and speakerphones on both the base and the handset, it utilizes high-power 5.8GHz wireless technology, and it's expandable to a monstrous eight-station system. And if that isn't enough, it also supports peer-to-peer VoIP operation via Panasonic's own joip (www.joip.com) protocol. Three years of free (yes, free) domestic and international calls between GLOBARANGE users is included.

Priced Right Notebook

Asus Eee PC 4G

Asus \$399

<http://eeeepc.asus.com/en/>

Ultra low-cost, ultra portable notebooks are suddenly all the rage. Unfortunately, few of them work as wonderfully as they look on paper. Asus' Eee PC 4G is one that does. Though it isn't exactly high powered and certainly won't handle

the latest games or 3D modeling apps, it's stunningly compact at just seven inches wide and weighing in at 0.92kg, and it features perks such as integrated wireless communication, a memory card reader, a point and click camera, and a ton of useful software. And the price is definitely right.

Deck the Halls
DEHP6900UB CD Receiver

Pioneer

\$499.99 www.pioneerelectronics.ca

CDs were better than cassettes, but connecting an MP3 player such as an iPod to a car deck made even CDs seem so... archaic. Yet for many people, an even better solution is a flash drive or a portable hard drive. You load it with tunes, connect it to the deck via a USB cable, stick it away in the glove compartment, and never see it again until you want to change the song list. Moreover, unlike some MP3 connections (such as cassette adapters), USB-attached drives deliver better sound as there's no digital to analogue conversion.

Of course, you need a deck with USB support (preferably a cable that runs from the rear of the unit rather than a highly visible USB port on the front of the deck). Several models in Kenwood's top-notch Excelon series of decks will do the trick, but we prefer the aesthetics of the Pioneer DEHP6900UB. There isn't much this drive won't do, and it sounds awesome to boot. Don't be afraid to bargain down this MSRP.

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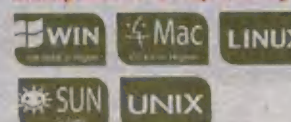
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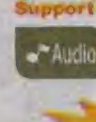


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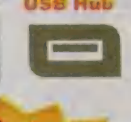


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Game gear gift guide

PC gear any gaming geek will love

We here at HUB: The Computer Paper clearly love alliteration, but not as much as we love getting the latest and greatest game gear come the holiday season.

HP Blackbird 002

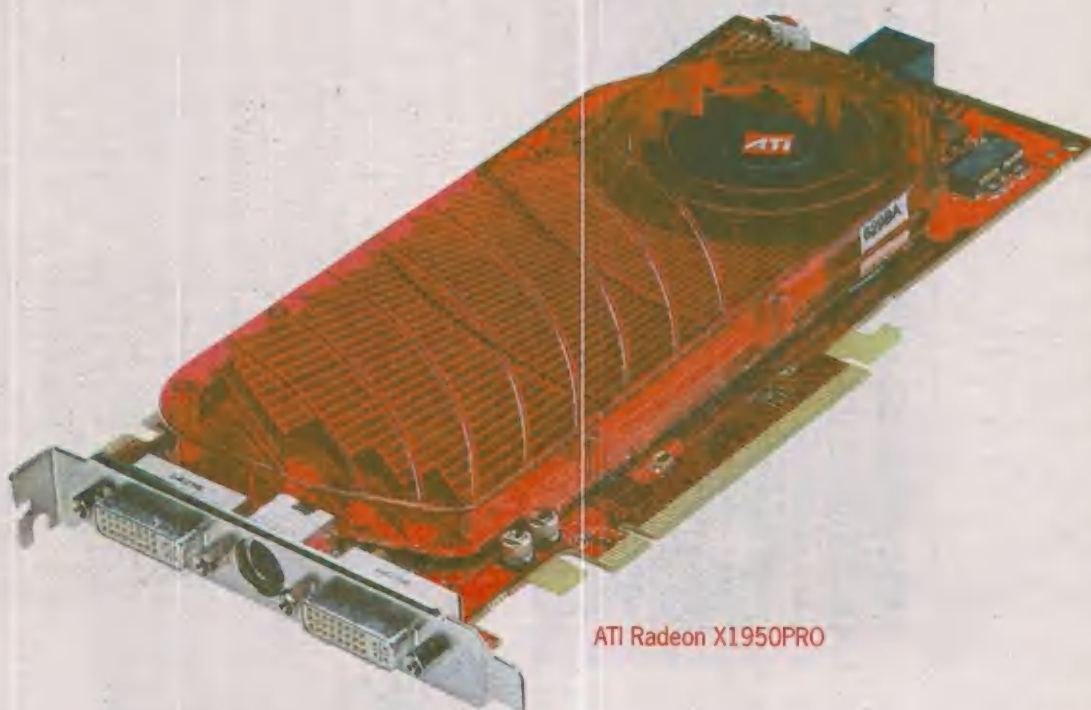
\$2,500 - \$7,000

www.hp.com/blackbird

If the gamer on your gift list has been really, really good, perhaps they deserve the super high-end Blackbird 002 gaming PC. HP may not be a brand you'd traditionally associate with high-end gaming rigs but the specs and reviews speak for themselves... like PCGamer's highest ever 97 per cent score.

The Blackbird 002 uses an AMD X2 Dual Core processor at 3.0 GHz with 1MB of L2 cache per core or an up to Intel Core2 Extreme Quad-Core 3.0GHz with 2MB of L2 cache per core. Four DIMM slots support up to 4GB of 1066 MHz DDR2 SDRAM and supports one or more GPUs from the NVIDIA GeForce 8800 GTS with 256MB GDDR3 SDRAM up to the GeForce 8800 ULTRA with 768MB of the same. The powerhouse PC can hold up to 4TB of internal storage with five HD bays and up to 750GB, 7,200 RPM SATA drives. Optical disc read/write comes in the form of your basic CD-R/RW up to Blu-Ray read/write or HD DVD-ROM/R.

TooHess entry and slot-out components make the Blackbird 002 perfect for tinkers though it doesn't offer quite the flexibility of component selection that a ground-up PC build would. Then again, you've got various bikes and other toys to assemble because Santa as yet doesn't drop them down the chimney pre-assembled so having the hard work done for you will probably sound pretty good come Christmas eve.



ATI Radeon X1950PRO

Radeon X1950 PRO

\$139-\$149

ati.amd.com

The perfect balance between price and performance, the Radeon X1950 PRO is a high-performance, sub-\$150, DirectX10 capable PCI Express card. It's a better than mid-range card that will neither break the bank nor blow benchmarks out of the water. However, it's unique in its category and offers some of the benefits

of higher-end cards and is a solid performer for geeks looking for impressive results within a real world budget.

It's also got the look too with a transparent red case covering the cooling fins and all the graphical prowess that lies beneath. Specifically, 575 MHz core speed, 256MB GDDR3 memory, HD video playback, 36 pixel and eight vertex shaders, dual DVI and a TV out CrossFire ready which means, if the gamer on your list gets two of these as gifts, rather than getting the receipt and going back to the store, he or she can bridge them for a true powerhouse gaming rig.



HP Blackbird 002

Belkin n52te



Belkin n52te

\$69.99

www.belkin.com

Belkin may not be the first name that comes to mind when you think of customized PC game control. However, the company has been offering and perfecting its n52 controllers for a long time with excellent results. The latest is the n52te and along with the nifty if not necessarily performance-enhancing blue LED back lighting come some real-world improvements. While the first in the line felt a bit too much like an



Ideazon Merc Stealth

actual keyboard, the n52te has a new and more comfortable feel and improved button responsiveness; all important in LAN or online frag fests...

In addition to the mappable and macro-ready keyboard style keys comes a gamepad that rests under the thumb of your left hand when using the device. This can be mapped to whatever function gamers want using the included software or can emulate mouse functions in FPS games. In addition, a scroll wheel makes for easy weapons switching and quick switching between three different programmed key states mean your uber gamer can have different set-up for different scenarios and easily switch them on the fly. For example, while running the ground as a grunt, the scroll wheel could look after quick weapons switching. Up in the bell tower, sniper rifle in hand, it could be used for more refined zoom control in some games. The gift of the perfect head shot and online bragging rights? That really is priceless.

Merc Stealth

\$89.99

www.ideazon.com

Ideazon has built a business around gamers; understanding what gamers look for in keyboard layout namely, customizability, comfort and other such important factors... like coloured LEDs. We love those.

The Merc Stealth features rubberized movement keys, a natural and neutral positioning of hands on the board, a full array of contoured gaming buttons and a simple and powerful macro editing software suite so that gamers can create the board layout that they want.

It lights up in three different colours and at three different intensities. In addition to the glow-escaping from around the keys, the keys themselves are lit up in whatever colour gamers choose; purple, red or blue. On the keyboard sit gold plated mic and headphone jacks and two USB 2.0 ports for connecting other peripherals.



Ideazon FragMat

FragMat

\$15.99

www.ideazon.com

A gaming gift that won't break the bank but that shows the gamer on your list you get it, the FragMat has a huge surface area of 301.7mm x 222.2mm and a slim profile at less than 2mm. The surface has been optimized for use with either optical or laser mice and offers a smooth surface perfect for sliding your mouse around. On the front, graphics from some of your gamers' potential favourites are available including World of Warcraft, Counter-Strike, Vanguard: Saga of Heroes, EverQuest II: Rise of Kunark and a few more. On the flip side, a non-slip surface ensures that it's the mouse and not the mouse pad that's sliding around.



Microsoft Habu

Habu gaming mouse

\$78.99

www.microsoft.com/hardware/gaming

Gamers are always looking for an edge; a leg up on the competition. There are many peripheral makers that want to offer that edge, each with its own list of reasons why you should choose their solution above all others.

Microsoft's Habu mouse is the result of a marriage of gaming mouse power house Razer and Microsoft. The mouse offers up to 2,000 DPI—quite possibly too much for your non-professional gamer—where a majority of gaming mice offer up to 1,600 DPI tracking. Two small buttons allow for toggling between DPI sensitivity between 400, 800, 1,600 and 2,000 DPI on the fly; useful when moving from an application that requires speed to one that requires more precision.

As with all things gaming it seems, the Habu glows a faint blue when plugged in. It caters to righties but is essentially ambidextrous. It offers full customization of tracking and sensitivity across axes, Teflon feet for a near weightless feeling glide and is wired for near instant response.

By Andrew Moore-Crispin

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Thermaltake Technology Inc.	525 Parriott Place	City of Industry	CA	www.thermaltake.com
Transat Electronics	24 Ronson Dr., Unit 4AF	Etobicoke	ON	www.transatelectronics.com
Iristel	675 Cochrane Drive, Sixth Fl	Markham	ON	www.iristel.com
Smart Vision	270 Esna Park Rd, Unit 11	Markham	ON	www.smartvisiondirect.com
Cr House Technology	3575 14 Ave., unit 10	Markham	ON	www.crhut.com
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Compuxellence	2155 Rue Mackay	Montreal	QC	www.compuxellence.com
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Ordinateur Marie	560, Sauv/© est.	Montreal	QC	www.pcl.ca
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Winnet Systems	1200 Eglinton Ave. East	Toronto	ON	www.winnet.ca
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3web	866-438-3932	sales@3web.com	http://www.Get3web.com	24.95	4.95	24.95	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	X	✓	X
995.ca	866-995-0995	sales@995.ca	http://www.995.ca	X	9.95	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	X	✓	X
Accelerated Connections	905-660-8783	sales@acceleratedconnections.com	http://www.dsl4u.ca	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	X	X	X
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Broadband Ontario Incorporated	866-870-0763	sales@broadbandontario.com	http://www.broadbandontario.com	X	X	X	X	X	X	69.99	49.95	X	X	X	✓	X
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Canquest Communications (Online) Inc	519-351-8647	sales@canquest.com	http://www.gocanquest.com	X	10	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Centre Informatique Sirius - C.I.S.	450-883-7777	info@siriusisp.com	http://www.siriusisp.com	X	15.95	34.95	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	X	X
Citenet Telecom Inc.	514-861-5050	sales@citenet.net	http://www.citenet.net	29.95	10	25.95	33.95	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X
Citenet Telecom Inc.	514-861-5050	sales@citenet.net	http://www.citenet.net	29.95	10	25.95	33.95	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X
Club Plus Internet	514-990-6753	info@clubplus.net	http://www.clubplus.net	X	7.95	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Colba.Net	514-856-3500	info@colba.net	http://www.colba.net	X	5.95	29.95	X	89.95	X	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	X
Colosseum Online Inc.	416-739-7873	info@colosseum.com	http://www.colosseum.com/	X	15.99	28.85	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X
Colosseum Online Inc.	416-739-7873	info@colosseum.com	http://www.colosseum.com/	X	15.99	28.85	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X
Compu-SOLVE Internet Services	877-567-6594	sales@csolve.net	http://www.csolve.net	X	9.95	19.95	X	X	X	X	89.95	✓	✓	X	X	X
Copper.net	888-336-3318	support@copper.net	http://www.copper.net/	X	9.95	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	X	✓	✓
Cyberglobe Communications Inc.	514-342-3883	sales@cyberglobe.net	http://www.cyberglobe.net	X	6.95	33.95	X	26.95	X	X	49.95	X	✓	✓	✓	X
Cybernet Communications Inc	416-410-2180	Toll Free 1-877-292.7638	http://www.mycybernet.net/	X	8.95	27.95	27.95	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓
DialTrax	434-836-4030	sales@dialtrax.net	http://www.dialtrax.net	X	12.95	X	X	19.95	X	X	X	✓	✓	X	✓	X
DialupAtCost	416-440-2662	sales@dialupatcost.ca	http://www.dialupatcost.ca	X	9.95	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	✓	X
DialZone Communications	819-920-3425	sales@dialzone.ca	http://www.dialzone.ca	X	8.95	34.95	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X

Data courtesy CanadianISP.com. For head-to-head comparison and the most recent ISP information, visit www.CanadianISP.com.

While we strive to bring you the most accurate and up-to-date information, please contact ISPs to confirm details.

Internet Service Provider Locator

Company name	Phone	Email	URL	Cable	Dial-up	DSL	Dry DSL	ISDN	Point-to-Point	Satellite	Wireless	Anti-spam	Web space	Allow server	Usernet	VoIP
EFSnet	877-465-2648	info@efsnet.ca	http://www.efsnet.ca	X	8.95	29.95	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	✓	X
Electronicbox	514-282-6933	sales@electronicbox.net	http://www.electronicbox.net	39.95	X	34.95	6.95	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Execulink	877-393-2854	mailbox@execulink.com	http://www.execulink.com	24.95	17.95	31.95	10	X	X	X	49.95	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Galaxy Broadband Communication Inc.	905-827-8583	sales@galaxybroadband.ca	http://www.galaxybroadband.ca	X	X	X	X	X	X	79.99	X	X	X	X	X	X
GrafNet	514-296-2804	info@grafnet.ca	http://www.grafnet.ca	X	X	40	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X	X
Hey-Ya! Dialup	920-465-0231	sales@hey-ya.net	http://www.hey-ya.net	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X
HotDealsCanada	866-799-6096	info@hdcanada.com	http://www.hdcanada.com	X	6.25	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	X
HotLinc.com	281-642-4028	info@hotlinc.com	http://www.hotlinc.com	X	14.95	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	X	X	✓
Ideal Access	888-478-2733	info@ideal-access.com	http://ideal-access.com	X	9.95	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	X	X	X
Information Gateway Services	800-268-3715	sales@igs.net	http://www.igs.net	X	10.95	34.95	X	10.95	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Inter.net Canada	514-481-2585	sales@ca.inter.net	http://www.ca.inter.net	X	7.95	29.95	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	X	✓	X
Interbaun Communications Inc.	780-447-8288	sales@interbaun.com	http://www.interbaun.com	X	10.99	34.99	X	10.99	X	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	X
Internet Light and Power Inc. (ILAP)	416-250-5600	sales@ilap.com	http://www.ilap.com	X	X	44.95	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	X	X
Iristel Inc.	514-448-9052	customercare@iristel.ca	http://www.iristel.ca	X	X	19.95	19.95	X	X	X	X	✓	X	X	X	9.95
Intrajump Communications	514-312-4109	sales@intrajumpinc.com	http://www.intrajumpinc.com	X	X	34	10	X	X	X	53	✓	✓	✓	X	✓
KEYNETZ	613-829-9539	keynetz@keynetz.com	http://www.keynetz.com	X	15	29.95	29.95	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kingston Online Services	613-549-8667	info@kos.net	http://www.kos.net/	X	7.5	26.95	X	7.5	X	X	44.95	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
LARA Internet Service Provider	905-631-6576	sales@lara.on.ca	http://www.lara.on.ca	X	6.95	25.95	35.95	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓
Le Cybernaut	418-543-9555	ventes@cybernaut.com	http://www.cybernaut.com	X	9.95	24.95	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X	X
LOGIX	877-564-4922	sales@logix.ca	http://www.logix.ca	X	16.95	24.95	X	21.95	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓
Look Communications	800-356-5665	mboudreau@team.look.ca	http://www.look.ca	X	10	37	X	X	X	X	19.95	✓	✓	X	✓	X
Lynx Communications	604-638-1818	info@lynx.net	http://www.lynx.net	X	10	34.5	X	30	X	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	X
M2DataTel inc.	519-894-2121	sales@m2datatel.com	http://m2datatel.com	X	9.99	27.9	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	✓	X
Magma Communications	800-576-7704	sales@magma.ca	http://www.magma.ca	X	10.75	31.95	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
MCI Canada	800-463-8123	webhosting@ca.mci.com	http://www.weknowip.ca/	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Montreal-DSL	877-685-2375	sales@montreal-dsl.com	http://www.montreal-dsl.com	X	16.99	24.95	37.2	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Muskoka Online	705-788-7873	sales@surenet.net	http://www.muskokaonline.com	44.95	10.99	39.99	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	X	X	X
Mustang technologies inc.	800-353-6642	info@mustangtechno.com	http://www.mustangtechno.com	X	10	29.95	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
MyCanadaOnline.Ca	888-505-5421	admin@mycanadaonline.ca	http://mycanadaonline.ca	X	10.99	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	X	X	X
NCTel inc	866-780-8599	ventes@nctel.ca	http://www.nctel.ca	27.5	15.95	34.95	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
NetAxis inc	888-482-8989	office@netaxis.ca	http://www.netaxis.ca	36	25	25	X	99	X	X	X	✓	X	X	X	X
Netcan.com	514-683-0899	sales@netcan.com	http://www.networkscanada.com	X	17.95	32.95	X	X	150	7	129	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Netscape Online	866-638-7227	info@netscape.ca	http://www.netscape.ca	X	18.95	39.95	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	X	X	X
NINA-IT International	514-752-1061	info@ninait.com	http://www.ninait.com	X	7.99	24.95	39.95	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X	X
Nothing But Net	519-660-7777	info@nutnbut.net	http://www.nutnbut.net	X	10	24.95	24.95	99	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X

Data courtesy CanadianISP.com. For head-to-head comparison and the most recent ISP information, visit www.CanadianISP.com.

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Internet Service Provider Locator

Company name	Phone	Email	URL	Cable	Dial-up	DSL	Dry DSL	ISDN	Point-Point	Satellite	Wireless	Anti-spam	Web space	Allow server	Usenet	VoIP
Nucleus Inc.	403-209-0000	info@nucleus.com	http://www.nucleus.com	X	9.95	29.95	X	9.95	X	X	X	✓	✓	X	✓	✓
Odynet Inc	877-679-8883	info@ody.ca	http://www.ody.ca	X	10	24.95	24.95	99	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Ontario Dsl	877-722-2453	info@ontariodsl.ca	http://www.ontariodsl.ca	X	13.5	22.99	26.99	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Oricom Internet Inc	866-967-4266	info@oricom.ca	http://www.oricom.ca	24.95	9.95	24.95	X	29.95	X	X	X	✓	✓	X	✓	✓
PrimeLite Communications	416-665-3320	sales@primelite.com	http://www.primelite.com	X	9.95	25.95	40.95	189.95	X	X	139	X	✓	✓	✓	✓
Primus Canada	877-704-4269	customer.care@primustel.ca	http://www.primustel.ca	X	8.95	19.95	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	X	✓	X
Progression Internet	514-876-0041	info@progression.net	http://www.progression.net	X	8.95	29.95	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X
PublicNet Canada	877-784-3932	sales@publicnet.ca	http://www.publicnet.ca	X	9.99	39.99	X	49.99	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X
PureSpeed.ca	866-777-1633	sales@purespeed.ca	http://purespeed.ca	X	14.99	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	X	X	X
Questzones.net	450-435-2932	mboisvert@questzones.com	http://www.questzones.com	42.95	12.95	55	X	99	X	X	59.95	✓	✓	X	✓	X
Radioactif.com	514-528-9889	service@radioactif.net	http://www.radioactif.com	X	4.95	29.95	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X
Rocler Inc.	866-377-1898	business@rocler.com	http://www.rocler.com	X	5.95	29.95	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Six Dot Net	514-879-4646	info@six.net	http://www.six.net	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓
SmokeSignal	866-517-6390	mason@smokesignal.net	http://www.smokesignal.net	X	19.95	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	X	✓	✓
Sogetel	450-771-1080	support@ntic.qc.ca	http://www.ntic.qc.ca	X	9.95	29	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X
Sonic Networks Inc.	877-467-6642	info@gosonic.com	http://www.gosonic.com	X	12.95	34.95	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	X	X
SonicLynx.ca	866-803-3651	sales@soniclynx.ca	http://www.soniclynx.ca	X	19.95	29.95	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Starweb Technologies	877-337-8820	sales@starwebtechnologies.com	http://www.starwebtechnologies.com	X	12.95	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	X	✓	X
Storm Internet Services	613-567-6585	brian@storm.ca	http://www.storm.ca	50	15	30	X	X	X	X	50	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
SureNet Communications	866-700-1977	sales@surenet.net	http://www.surenet.net	44.95	22.95	39.99	X	X	X	X	39.99	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
TDCNet	905-947-8053	Sebastian@tdcnet.ca	http://www.tdcnet.ca	X	X	35.95	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X	X
TekSavvy Solutions Inc.	877-779-1575	sales@teksavvy.com	http://www.teksavvy.com	X	7.99	24.95	37.2	X	1500	X	29.99	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
TeraGo Networks Inc.	866-837-2461	frank.baldwin@terago.ca	http://www.terago.ca	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TOAST.net Internet Service	888-862-7863	sales@toast.net	http://www.toast.net/agents/link.asp?adv=can-isp&page=services/dialup	X	9.95	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Trytel Internet Inc.	613-722-6321	sales@trytel.com	http://www.trytel.com	X	9.95	34.95	X	99	X	X	50	X	✓	✓	✓	X
Tube-e Communications Inc	416-784-1233	sales@tube-e.com	http://www.tube-e.com	X	10.95	39.95	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	X	X	X
Velcom	866-983-5266	sales@velcom.ca	http://www.velcom.ca	X	7.95	24.95	37	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓
Vianet Internet Solutions	800-788-0363	sales@vianet.ca	http://www.vianet.ca	24.99	9.95	29.99	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
VIF Internet	514-353-9988	info@vif.com	http://www.vif.com/	24.95	9.95	24.95	34.95	14.95	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wave II Networks Ltd	905-632-4018	info@waveii.com	http://www.waveii.com	X	X	45	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Zeuter Development Corporation	705-746-4625	sales@zeuter.com	http://www.zeuter.com	X	0.01	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
ZiD.Com	877-659-6505	sales@zid.com	http://www.zid.com	X	8.95	29.95	10	19.99	X	X	49.95	✓	✓	✓	✓	X

Data courtesy CanadianISP.com. For head-to-head comparison and the most recent ISP information, visit www.CanadianISP.com.
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Marketplace PROFILE

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Top PC game titles of 2007

Ten titles PC gamers hope to find under the pine

Finding a gift for a PC gamer has never been easier than in 2007, a year which saw fewer boxed games for Windows being produced but a greater per centage of those games earning critical raves. That means just about any triple-A title you run across in the store is probably something the gaming geek in your family would love to play. But if you want a sure-fire winner, stick with us and select your gift from this list.

Crysis

\$49.99

www.ea.com/crysis

ESRB: Mature

Pretty much the prettiest PC game ever made (assuming you have a beefy machine capable of cranking out highly polished DirectX 10 glitz), Crysis, developed by the same folks who made the similarly stunning FarCry, is a hyper-realistic sci-fi shooter that sees you taking on two great menaces: Alien invaders and North Korea. It's got a lengthy and highly diverse campaign that requires smart tactics and a quick trigger finger, plus a frenetic fragfest mode that supports up to 32 players.



World in Conflict

\$59.99

www.worldinconflict.com

ESRB: Teen

A real-time strategy game for people who hate real-time strategy, World in Conflict is all about non-stop action and massive scale destruction. Set in an alternate history 1989 in which the Soviets figured they'd rather declare war on the West than adopt democracy, players command relatively small groups of units in the defence of Europe and the United States, calling in concentrated barrages of fire support—ranging from mortar fire to naval cannons to tactical nukes—as needed. There's no building of barracks or harvesting of resources; each mission is simply a long series of short and wildly intense battles.

BioShock

\$59.99

www.2kgames.com/bioshock/

ESRB: Mature

This one's got it all: A deep and engaging dystopian sci-fi story filled with moral ambiguity (philosopher/



novelist Ayn Rand served as the writers' inspiration); a highly detailed retro art deco visual design that takes indoor environmental realism in games to new heights; and compelling game mechanics that make each and every moment you spend in the underwater city of Rapture nothing short of exhilarating. Best of all, modest system requirements mean it doesn't take a \$3,000 powerhouse system to run well and look great.

Supreme Commander

\$29.99 www.supremecommander.com

ESRB: Everyone

Featuring some of the biggest battles ever seen in a strategy game, Supreme Commander finds players controlling hundreds of sea, air, and land units each with wildly varying abilities in missions that have multiple objectives and typically last several hours. In other words, it's not for RTS n00bs. However, if you have a taste for things tactical you'll undoubtedly dig the deep strategy and smart features, like the ability to quickly zoom out to near global level so you can get the big picture in the game's enormous fights.



The Orange Box

\$54.99

<http://orange.half-life2.com>

ESRB: Mature

Five great games, one low price. The Orange Box is the best deal in the video game world right now, serving up all three Half-Life 2 games (the original plus its two shorter episodic sequels), a terrific, cartoon-like update to the decade-old multiplayer masterpiece Team Fortress, and the surprising highlight of the bundle, Portal: a student-made video game experiment that sees players shooting portal holes in walls and stepping through them to navigate a labyrinthine laboratory. It's bizarre, addictive, and about as hilarious as





a video game gets, thanks to an evil computer voice (that sounds a little like Stephen Hawking) that accompanies you throughout the maze.

Gears of War

\$49.99

www.gearsowar.com

ESRB: Mature

If it was good for the Xbox 360, it's downright amazing running at 1920 x 1200 on a tricked out Windows PC. If you have a powerhouse rig with a DirectX 10 graphics card the insanely detailed character models and environmental architecture will be nothing short of jaw-dropping. And with a couple of hours of PC-exclusive campaign content, all-new multiplayer modes, and full access to Epic Studios' powerful Unreal engine to create your own maps, Xbox 360 GoW players ought to be turning green with envy right about now.



Hellgate: London

\$49.99

www.hellgatelondon.com

ESRB: Mature

Referred to by some as a spiritual successor to Diablo—a popular top-down action RPG that involves plenty of brawling and extensive character development—Hellgate: London is actually a quantum leap forward in game design and story writing. Players can explore a vast, futuristic London infested with demons and other nefarious creatures either by themselves or online in the company of human allies—and without a subscription fee. It's gorgeous in presentation, epic in scope, and undeniably involving.

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

\$49.99

www.callofduty.com

ESRB: Mature

Three games into the Call of Duty franchise and Activision has pretty much mastered the World War 2 combat experience (at least as much as the video game medium is ever likely to). So, for the fourth installment in the series the developers moved the series forward a half dozen or so decades and gave



us an unidentified middle-eastern enemy. But while the setting is modern and the military hardware more advanced, the drama is still vintage CoD—expect plenty of thrilling and emotional skirmishes that take place in depressingly dilapidated (though graphically gorgeous) locales.

Enemy Territory: Quake Wars

\$49.99

www.enemyterritory.com

ESRB: Teen

The long lived Quake franchise is reinvented—at least partially—with this mashup of old school twitchy shoot-

ing action and sprawling, Battlefield-esque arenas of combat to create a game that ends up being familiar and enjoyable for fans of both genres. There's nothing particularly innovative about the five soldier classes that can be chosen, the vehicles you get to pilot, or the game modes that are available, but everything has been finely tuned and well polished, making Enemy Territory: Quake Wars a no-brainer for any FPS fan.

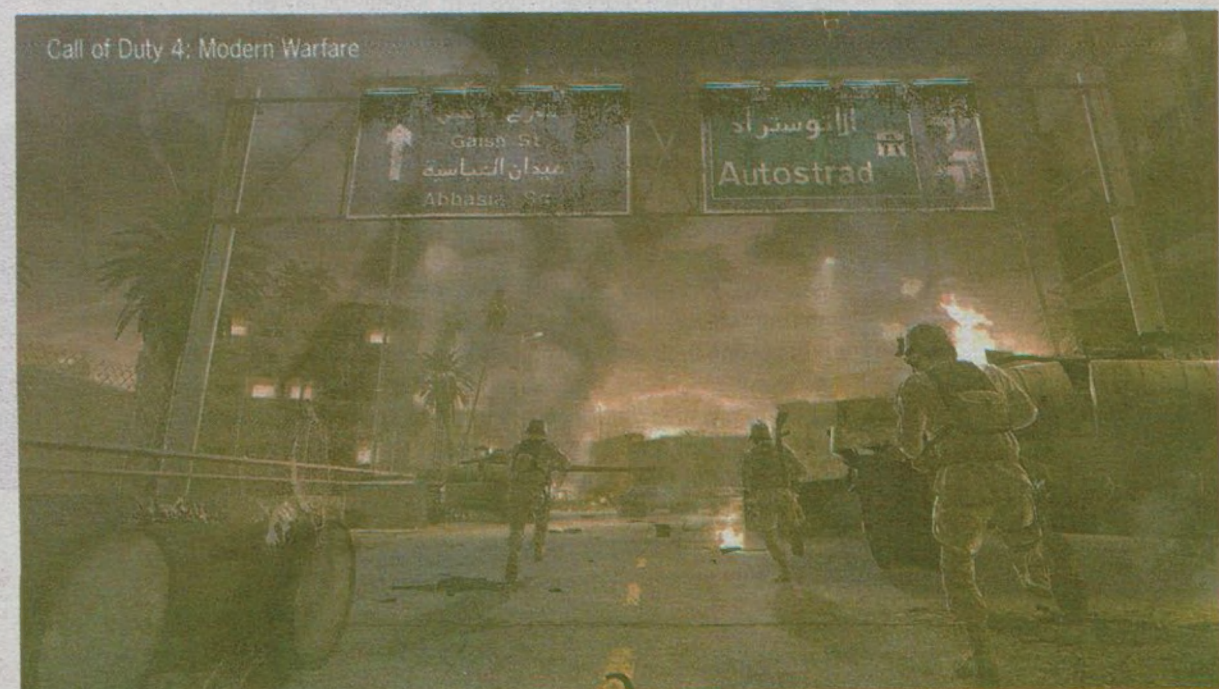
Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars

\$44.99 www.commandandconquer.com

ESRB: Teen

Real-time strategy games seem to get more complex and harder to play every year, but that's not the case with Command & Conquer 3, a throwback to RTS days of old when the best strategy was simply to build up a massive army as quickly as possible with which to obliterate the enemy. Missions are uncommonly and refreshingly short—often less than 30 minutes—but with three separate campaigns (one from the perspective of each faction in the game) you can expect to squeeze out a good two dozen hours of play in single-player, countless more in multiplayer.

By Chad Sapieha



The Last Byte

Take it or leave it - my eternal laptop question



I've been slogging around with a notebook in tow for 20 years. As pathetic as it sounds, I remember them all, from my first Tandy Model 100 through the dual floppy Toshiba 1100, my first colour notebook (an AST with a trick thumb trackball), a succession of ThinkPads to my current dynamic duo, an older ThinkPad T42 and newer MacBook Pro. Through it all, one question has persisted and still awaits a final answer: should I bring it or leave it behind.

Initially the answer was yes, bring it because – well, I'll admit it, having one of those early portable computers was something of a status symbol because they were pretty rare. When I started writing about computers, the answer was still yes because the notebook became a portable lab. You could make discoveries big and small about the portable computing experience or computing in general, and it made good copy, because more people were now computing or traveling with notebooks, and were interested in knowing about the possibilities and pitfalls too. Along comes the Internet and email and a bigger yes to the question because now your office is where your tools are, and with a notebook that means almost anywhere.

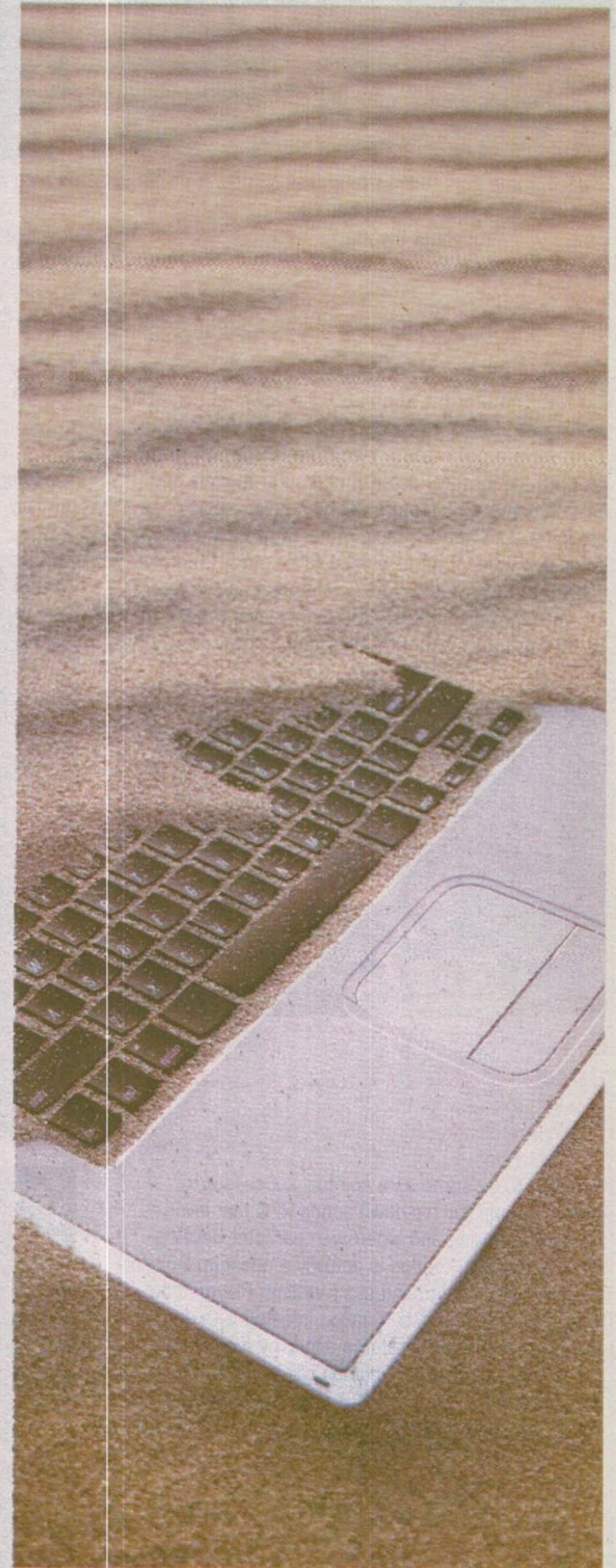
A small technology bump and the yes turns into a maybe not. That bump is Windows CE. A computer that fits in your jacket pocket; it even has a mini MS Office suite onboard. Now there's a concept – half baked it turns out. Subsequent generations are better. I still have a Sharp 4500 with a colour screen and a 28.8 modem onboard somewhere in a junk drawer. It still works perfectly and I sometimes think "maybe I'll start using this again," although it's like the beater Nissan Sentra you had in college – the memory of it is better than the actual experience of it. It's next to the first gen Jornada with the third party fold-up keyboard. For a journalist, these were actually quite serviceable for tapping out 1,000 word stories. But after the novelty wears off you think "sheesh, why am I torturing myself when I could be using a computer with a real keyboard and a decent screen." There were some attempts to make Windows CE devices with keyboards and screens more to notebook proportions, but they turn out to be not quite the magic bullet, so once again the answer swings to yes, bring a real notebook along.

Another bump, this time a bigger one that's called BlackBerry, and once again the answer swings to "maybe not." The bump is bigger because of the wireless datacomm that makes it oh-so easy to send information anywhere, or receive it from anywhere. And for that you can put up with a teensy thumbboard. I like the BB experience more than ever now that EDGE datacomm speeds are readily available. Just last month I took an overnight trip to New York for the Olympus E-3 launch, wrote a story and filed it to Toronto on my BB smartphone while sitting in the airport. No notebook in tow, and not missed.

It seems like the question could now be answered, and if all I did with my traveling notebook were email and word processing, I could very easily substitute it for a BB. But the datastream we like to plug into is now much richer, so that means big screens and big hard drives make the experience better, so once again the balance shifts to "yes, bring the notebook."

I see more and more people in downtime places like airport lounges watching videos on iPods and smartphones. I think I can do that with my BB phone tool, although I haven't got past loading a few tunes onto its microSD card. I'm planning a trip overseas next year and there's no question that I'll be taking a notebook, even though it is a pure holiday, not a working one. At least I think it is. The unavoidable consequence of always having a laptop in tow is that it's hard to separate work and play.

'til next time ...
David Tanaka
Editor at Large



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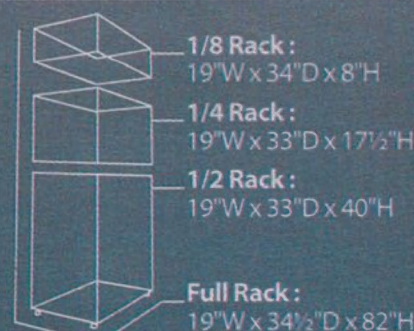
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